
EXPLORING THE ESOTERIC DIMENSION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION THROUGH *KHIDMAH* STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

MENJELAJAHI DIMENSI ESOTERIS PENDIDIKAN ISLAM MELALUI MOTIVASI *KHIDMAH* SANTRI

AGUS RIWANDA, MUKHAMMAD ZAMZAMI, AND
ABDULLAH HOSSEINIESKANDIAN

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Agus Riwanda

UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya,
St. A. Yani 117 Surabaya, East Java,
Indonesia
e-mail:
02050122021@student.uinsby.ac.id

Mukhammad Zamzami

UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya,
St. A. Yani 117 Surabaya, East Java,
Indonesia
e-mail: m.zamzami@uinsby.ac.id

Abdullah Hosseinieskandian

University of Tabriz,
East Azerbaijan Province, Tabriz 29
Bahman Boulevard, Iran
e-mail: a.hoseini99@ms.tabrizu.ac.ir

Abstract

This research investigates the significance of khidmah, or service, in the Islamic boarding school tradition as a means of gaining access to the esoteric components of Islamic education, particularly blessings. The motivation, process, and service orientation of musaidin students (serving students) at the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School are the topic of this study. This qualitative study included 26 Musaidin students as participants, with data collected through in-depth interviews. The analysis was carried out by reducing, coding, and establishing themes. According to the findings of this study, the importance of loyalty to teachers and conformity with the norms of Islamic boarding schools carried out by Santri Musaidin in order to receive blessings. Santri Musaidin's compliance has an impact on positive behavior change, better living situations, economic well-being, and social acceptance. The experience of Santri Musaidin has transformed Islamic education not only in terms of greater knowledge, but also in terms of moral and spiritual growth.

Keywords: Esoteric Dimension; Khidmah; Islamic Boarding School.

Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi pentingnya khidmah atau pengabdian dalam tradisi pesantren sebagai sarana untuk mengakses dimensi esoteris pendidikan Islam, khususnya berkah. Penelitian ini berfokus pada motivasi, proses, dan orientasi pelayanan Santri Musaidin (santri yang mengabdikan diri) di Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'wah. Studi kualitatif ini melibatkan 26 Santri Musaidin sebagai partisipan, dengan menggunakan wawancara mendalam sebagai metode pengumpulan data. Analisis dilakukan melalui reduksi, pengkodean, dan penetapan tema. Hasil penelitian ini menyatakan bahwa pentingnya kepatuhan kepada guru dan kepatuhan terhadap aturan-aturan pondok pesantren yang dilakukan oleh Santri Musaidin sehingga dapat menerima *berkah*. Kepatuhan yang dilakukan Santri Musaidin berdampak pada perubahan perilaku positif, peningkatan kondisi kehidupan, kesejahteraan ekonomi, dan penerimaan dalam masyarakat. Transformatif pendidikan Islam tidak hanya dalam bentuk peningkatan pengetahuan, akan tetapi pertumbuhan moral dan spiritual melalui pengalaman Santri Musaidin.

Kata Kunci: Dimensi Esoterik; Khidmah; Pondok Pesantren.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a value-laden process that closely reflects the wider cultural reality of a particular society. Islamic education combines theological foundations with educational concepts and integrates interdisciplinary methodological designs in the Social Sciences and Humanities (Sahin, 2018). Education aims to work on the reality of human consciousness, free will, critical reasoning, and creativity. Methodologically critical education must be based on reflection and real action. In other words, these principles are used to turn static facts into dynamic conditions for individual educators, students, and society as a whole (Idris et al., 2018).

Islamic education requires the development of all human potential, including spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects. This development is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith and seeks to produce human beings who have piety and devote themselves to worshipping God (Shah, 2012). Islamic education emphasizes humanization and liberation as an educational orientation and places students and educators as subjects in the learning process. Islamic education combines vertical (spirituality) and horizontal (social) aspects in one educational orientation. This concept is different from the critical education paradigm, which places more emphasis on materialistic matters and less on spiritual aspects (2018).

The educational context in Indonesia places Islamic education at the grassroots level and

can be declared the first form of formal education nationally. Islamic education in Indonesia is developed based on noble religious and cultural values with a special focus on respect and tolerance. In Indonesia, Islamic education is pervasive and is the main determinant of Indonesian culture. This education places a clear emphasis on embodying Islamic Learning in the character of students. It encourages them to play an active role in society to guide them as Muslims and maintain their cultural and religious identity (Roslan Mohd Nor & Malim, 2014). Pesantren as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia makes a teacher a role model for the formation of the character of its students and bases the acquisition of knowledge through *sanad* and *mu'tabara* books (Hidayat, 2017). In the Islamic boarding school education system, knowledge must be practiced otherwise it is like a tree without fruit. One's conviction to practice knowledge is known as *tawfiq*, which is an intercession from Allah. When a person is able to apply his knowledge and make an impact on himself and his community, then this knowledge is considered a blessing (Handrianto, 2019).

The main contribution of Islamic education can be mapped into two broad categories: contribution to the formation of good human character, spiritual character, and militancy character, as well as the contribution of traditional learning systems that accommodate aspects of divinity and humanity (Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019). Islamic education must stand tall in the face

of modernity. The beauty of Islam's message must not be reduced to a slogan but should emerge as a solution to a problem. While the world is preoccupied with modernity and secularism, Islam must be at the heart of the education system that maintains the nobility of human morality (Othman & Mohamad, 2016).

The researcher identified that the decline in the achievement of Islamic values by students through the process of Islamic education was not only caused by strong outside influences, especially negative digital content but also the uprooting of the spirit of Islamic education, which focuses on the blessings (*berkah*) of knowledge (Ifadah & Utomo, 2019). Exoterically, education is the transfer of knowledge and the empowerment of human potential. But esoterically, especially in Islamic education, knowledge is interpreted as a light that illuminates human life. This light is a manifestation of the blessings (*berkah*) of that knowledge. The blessing of knowledge is also a differentiator between Islamic education and others (Handrianto, 2019). To achieve the blessing of knowledge, there are many steps that students can take, and the main thing is to respect knowledge, achieve the pleasure of the teacher, and serve in the dissemination of knowledge. This *Khidmah* tradition has existed since the beginning of the development of Islam as a form of dedication, devotion, and loyalty (Arifin, 2015). Not only as a medium for receiving blessings (*berkah*), but *Khidmah* is also an educational practice that directly instills awareness in students to devote

themselves, humility, sincerity, concern, and the spirit of struggle to advance Islamic society (Abdillah & Maskuri, 2022; Kuncoro, 2022).

In recent years, concern for forms of Islamic esotericism has become more prominent in Western esotericism due to the problematic of regional and implied cultural boundaries and the promotion of a global perspective. Western instability as a regional and cultural category involves rethinking the comparative paradigm between Western and Islamic esotericism. This endeavor was determined by the initial elaboration of Islamic esotericism, which had yet to be carried out systematically. Islamic esoteric currents can be assessed according to two epistemological paradigms: an intellectual or revelatory approach to hidden phenomena (natural, heavenly, and divine), which intersects with a perceived social orientation in personal and communal piety (Saif, 2019).

Al-Ghazali's criteria for Islamic esotericism, as outlined in his work *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, provide a framework for identifying esoteric elements within texts (Gianotti, 2001). These criteria emphasize the subtle nature of esoteric knowledge, which is accessible only to the spiritual elite and remains concealed from the unworthy. This hidden knowledge, not explicitly revealed by prophets and pious individuals, is believed to possess immense gravity that may be detrimental to the general public but not to the elite. Through the use of allegory and symbols, esoteric concepts have the power to deeply impact and benefit individuals. The process of understanding

involves moving from a general perception to a mystical realization and intuition, uniting the whole and the particulars. Verbal language serves as a tool to bridge the gap between the external and internal realms, refining comprehension of both aspects. Therefore, esotericism in texts encompasses a deeper understanding and exploration of spiritual dimensions, enhancing the overall knowledge and insight of individuals (Saif, 2019).

In conclusion, the term Islamic esotericism originates from the early 20th century, describing a construct developed by Traditionalists and non-Traditionalists with whom they have a relationship on a personal or intellectual level. This term is centered on the artificial separation between inner and *zahir* and, as a result, *haqīqa* and *shari'a* (Saif, 2019). This concept is in line with Narimani's views regarding the esoteric interpretation, namely trying to uncover the inner meaning and relate it to the inner and metaphysical dimensions of consciousness (Narimani, 2021).

Tiryakian defines three main components of this esoteric culture. These elements are determined from general elements that exist in a culture but take a specific form in that culture. It is considered a distinctive feature of the esoteric: a set of beliefs and doctrines (oriented in cognitive and moral forms), a set of practices oriented to practical action, and a social organization in which actions are patterned or structured (Tiryakian, 2013).

The motivations of individuals to serve their teachers can vary, and it is not appropriate to

make broad generalizations about a particular group or culture. However, in some traditional Islamic educational settings, there may be a strong emphasis on serving one's teacher and seeking blessings as a means of gaining spiritual benefits and guidance (Roslan Mohd Nor & Malim, 2014).

In Islamic tradition, seeking knowledge and guidance are highly valued, and the teachings of the Prophet emphasize the importance of both (Kasim & Yusoff, 2014). The statement "who increases knowledge but does not increase guidance, the farther away from Allah" highlights the idea that knowledge alone is not sufficient to gain closeness to God; it must be accompanied by action and guidance.

Furthermore, the concept of *hidāyah*, or guidance, is indeed a central aspect of Islamic education. The goal of seeking knowledge is not only to gain intellectual understanding but also to apply that knowledge in practical ways that benefit oneself and others. This holistic approach to education aims to develop individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also guided by Islamic principles and values in all aspects of their lives (Huda et al., 2016; Lubis, 2015).

This research reveals the motivation of the students in serving and their meaning of blessings as a result of dedication to the teacher. By exploring the motivations of students in serving their teachers and their understanding of blessings, researchers could potentially gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of traditional

Islamic educational settings.

Moreover, this research could help to identify any potential gaps or limitations in traditional Islamic educational systems and lead to the development of new approaches or strategies to enhance the learning experience for students. By gaining a deeper understanding of the motivations and beliefs that underpin the relationship between students and teachers, researcher provide valuable insights into the ways in which knowledge and values are transmitted and internalized in traditional Islamic educational settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative research involved 26 musaidin students at the Darullughah Wadda'wah Ba'alawi Islamic boarding school. This Islamic boarding school is a branch of the central Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic boarding school, located in Raci Bangil Pasuruan. Researchers involved all Santri Musaidin as a saturated sample. Santri musaidin; students who are in charge of helping the operational of the pesantren and the needs of the kyai. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews to make it easier for researchers to explore deeper meanings about the motivation and process of *Khidmah* Santri Musaidin and their relation to the esoteric dimension of Islamic education, namely blessing. The data validity was carried out by extending the research time to see whether there were changes in statements from data sources on the same questions. Data analysis was carried out thematically through several

steps, namely data reduction, coding, searching and reviewing themes.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differences and Similarities between Regular Santri and Musaidin

In Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic boarding school, students are classified into regular santri and santri musaidin, both considered as the children of Abuya Hasan Baharun, entrusted with upholding and disseminating the school's vision and mission. Despite their shared status, the two student groups have distinct roles and responsibilities. Regular santri focus primarily on their studies, progressing through different levels of education. On the other hand, Santri Musaidin play a crucial role in supporting the school's activities and operations, engaging in tasks such as cooking, printing, driving, maintenance, administration, and assisting in the school's cooperative endeavors.

While regular santri are bound by strict rules and require permission to leave the boarding school, musaidin enjoy more flexibility in this regard. However, regular santri also have a *khidmah* obligation at the end of their study period, where they serve as assistant teachers in other Islamic boarding schools associated with Darullughah Wadda'wah. Many of these schools were established by alumni of Darullughah Wadda'wah. After a year of assisting, they return to Darullughah Wadda'wah to become teachers and contribute to various operational segments of

the pesantren, including student room management, health and safety, cleanliness, and education administration.

Esoteric and Exoteric Factors to Become Santri Musaidin

The decision to become a Santri Musaidin is influenced by a combination of esoteric and exoteric factors. Esoteric factors involve the spiritual dimension, including seeking knowledge, guidance, and blessings from teachers. This encompasses a deep understanding of Islamic values and a commitment to applying them in daily life. On the other hand, exoteric factors include practical considerations such as access to quality education, supportive infrastructure, and a conducive environment provided by the Islamic boarding school.

One significant factor motivating individuals to become Santri Musaidin is the pursuit of a more decent livelihood. Many participants mentioned the hardships they faced outside the boarding school, such as difficulty finding food and suitable living conditions. The Islamic boarding school offered a solution by providing guaranteed food and accommodation. Over time, the participants recognized that engaging in *khidmah* is not only a means of obtaining a livelihood but also a path to blessings (*berkah*). They realized that serving others through *khidmah* is a way to gain spiritual rewards.

Financial considerations also play a role, as the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic boarding school offers tuition fee waivers and subsidies for religious education. This attracts students

who may not have had the means to pursue education otherwise. Additionally, some participants transitioned from being regular students to Santri Musaidin due to the more flexible learning schedule and less stringent rules associated with the latter. They found it easier to learn and memorize, allowing them to better manage their studies and commitments. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ma'rifudin (10 November 2022):

“I originally came to this dalwa boarding school for *Khidmah* because there was no work in the village. Instead of burdening parents, it's better to come here. Surely here is guaranteed food and a bed. That was the initial motivation. After participating in the *ta'lim* for a while, I realized that *Khidmah* is the main way to get blessings (*berkah*).”

A significant motivation for becoming a Santri Musaidin is the desire to receive blessings from the habaib or the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The presence of influential habibs and kyais' children attending the Islamic boarding school indicates the perceived abundance of blessings within the institution. Being in the company of pious individuals and their descendants is believed to transmit blessings to those around them. This aligns with the belief that associating with righteous individuals is a remedy for an impure heart and that such gatherings lead to spiritual rewards. The influence of the environment and community in shaping students' character and mindset is consistent with educational theories.

***Berkah*; an Educational Benefit for Santri Musaidin**

The unique learning experience of Santri Musaidin, with their distinct schedule and method, sets them apart from regular students in Islamic boarding schools. While they may not possess the same level of theoretical knowledge as their counterparts, the education they receive through *Khidmah* serves a deeper purpose. Despite not undergoing the typical curriculum, Santri Musaidin believe that their service cultivates humility, loyalty to their teachers' teachings, responsibility, sincerity, and a willingness to make sacrifices for noble causes. They perceive their education as a transformative journey that shapes their character and purifies their hearts from undesirable traits. Despite the apparent disparity in theoretical knowledge, Santri Musaidin have a strong conviction in their mission to spread the knowledge imparted by the Messenger of Allah, instilling in them a resolute determination for success. Thus, while their educational path may diverge, the values and virtues instilled in Santri Musaidin contribute to their overall growth and dedication to their chosen path. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Miftahus Surur (08 November 2022):

“In Islamic literature, knowledge is the light that illuminates the human heart so that he can decide the best course of action in his life. Many people who are knowledgeable but do not get guidance, even farther from Allah. To get guidance, one way is to serve, to help with all the needs of Islamic boarding schools and teachers. My main goal of becoming a musaidin is *tabarruk*.”

Evidence of the Existence of Blessings (*Berkah*) as the Impact of *Khidmah*

Regarding the proof of blessings (*berkah*) as the impact of *Khidmah*, all participants stated that the impact of *Khidmah* cannot be measured sensorial. Blessing is an inner dimension whose existence is only felt by the individual concerned. Even though it is subjective, the essence of the blessing can be seen through real life, proven empirically. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ali Ma'ruf (13 November 2022):

“Indeed, the blessing cannot be seen with the eye. However, in many scientific texts we learn that blessings (*berkah*) exist. Blessing itself is interpreted as *ziyadat al-khayr*, or increase in goodness. So, someone whose life is blessed, he is always in goodness.”

The level of blessing obtained is often associated with the level of obedience of the students towards the teacher and the rules of the boarding school. Santri, who don't break any rules and respect their teacher spiritually, their life will be more comfortable and directed. However, if the santri do not comply with the rules of the boarding school and their respect for the teacher is low, even though he has good intelligence and high learning outcomes, his life is less blessed.

The Party that Needs and Receives the Benefits of *Khidmah*

A significant motivation for becoming a Santri Musaidin is the desire to receive blessings from the *habaib* or the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The presence of influential *habibs* and *kyais'* children attending the Islamic boarding school

indicates the perceived abundance of blessings within the institution. Being in the company of pious individuals and their descendants is believed to transmit blessings to those around them. This aligns with the belief that associating with righteous individuals is a remedy for an impure heart and that such gatherings lead to spiritual rewards. The influence of the environment and community in shaping students' character and mindset is consistent with educational theories.

Khidmah, the concept of service, holds significant importance in the Islamic education system, benefiting both the Darullughah Wadda'wah boarding school and the santri musaidin. The pesantren benefits by reducing the need for specific funds and resources for various tasks, such as cleaning, administration, and maintenance. However, it is the Santri Musaidin who acknowledge the greatest advantages of *Khidmah*. Initially, they come to the boarding school voluntarily, seeking blessings and serving others. They also receive financial support and a decent livelihood.

For many santri musaidin, *Khidmah* is an integral part of Islamic education, combining knowledge transfer with the management of the soul. It instills determination and a fighting spirit, equipping students with valuable preaching experiences. The blessings of knowledge become evident through *Khidmah*'s usefulness, and the pleasure of teachers becomes an essential aspect of Islamic education. The integration of *Khidmah* as a learning medium provides

students with a deeper understanding of its significance and its connection to the Prophet's struggle.

The absence of the *khidmah* concept in public schools leads to a limited perspective on education as merely cognitive knowledge transfer, lacking affective aspects such as respect for teachers and loyalty to the institution's vision. In contrast, *khidmah* at the pesantren nurtures loyalty and shapes students into representatives of the institution's vision, fostering a sense of belonging and a commitment to realizing the vision and mission of Islamic boarding schools. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Ciman Mandrawiguna (09 December 2022):

"I am a public-school graduate. There is no concept of *Khidmah* in public schools. We consider education as a service that must be provided to students. The main purpose of going to school is to get a diploma and some skills that might be useful in getting a job. Because of that, respect between students and teachers may be lacking. Students' loyalty to the institution's vision is also not formed because there is no *Khidmah*. At the pesantren, *Khidmah* teaches us to be loyal to the institution's vision. Wherever we are, we will try to be a good representation of the institution and realize the vision and mission of Islamic boarding schools as best we can."

Khidmah plays a vital role in the Islamic education system, beyond knowledge acquisition. It unlocks the blessings of knowledge and creates awareness of a mission to continue the Prophet's struggle. The essence of *Khidmah* remains the same across different pesantrens, emphasizing the

importance of knowledge's practical application and its impact. The prayers and blessings of teachers are considered more valuable than knowledge itself, highlighting the spiritual dimension intertwined with education.

One of the traditions born from the pesantren as the oldest educational institution in Indonesia is *khidmah*, namely the willingness of the santri to devote themselves to the kyai to strengthen the process of *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* in the pesantren. This tradition is in line with Islamic education, which is oriented towards the internalization and cultivation of *adab* (knowledge, character, and action) in human beings. Instilling the value of devotion and sincerity as if it had become an integral part of the educational process in pesantren. Among the students, the *khidmah* tradition is not a practice that refers to the meaning of submission, which means weak, so it seems low, but for the santri, *khidmah* is an honorable endeavor in learning in the Islamic boarding school, which is precisely when students with a willingness to do service will bring blessings in life (Kuncoro, 2022).

This research suggests that becoming a Santri Musaidin involves both esoteric and exoteric factors. Esoteric factors include internal or spiritual aspects, such as one's intention and motivation to seek knowledge and guidance from the teacher, and a deep commitment to Islamic values and principles. Exoteric factors refer to external or tangible factors, such as access to quality educational institutions with competent teachers, appropriate resources and infrastructure, and a supportive

community.

The research highlights the various reasons why individuals choose to become Santri Musaidin, including the availability of a comfortable and secure livelihood, the provision of subsidized tuition fees and living expenses, and the desire to receive blessings from the habaib. Additionally, the research suggests that the environment and community in Islamic boarding schools play a significant role in shaping the character and mindset of students.

The research found that the impact of *khidmah* cannot be measured sensorially and that blessing is an inner dimension that can only be felt by the individual concerned. Even though it is subjective, the essence of blessing can be seen through real life, proven empirically. The level of blessing obtained is often associated with the level of obedience of the students towards the teacher and the rules of the boarding school. Santri who obey the rules and respect their teacher spiritually tend to have more comfortable and directed lives. Graduates of the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School often become role models for the community, especially as leaders of religious activities.

According to Frithjof Schoun, exotericism is a religion's external, formal, legal, dogmatic, ritual, ethical and moral aspects. Meanwhile, esotericism is religion's metaphysical aspect and internal dimension (Aymard & Laude, 2004; Schoun, 2005, p. 227). Esotericism refers to the inner, hidden, or secret aspects of religious or spiritual teachings. It involves

the pursuit of mystical or hidden knowledge that goes beyond the exoteric (outer) aspects of a religion (Hanegraaff, 2016; Saif, 2019). Esoteric teachings often delve into the nature of reality, the inner spiritual journey, and the direct experience of the divine. In Islam, esoteric teachings are often referred to as Sufism or *tasawwuf*.

Blessings, or *barakah* in Arabic, are considered to be a divine favor, grace, or spiritual abundance bestowed upon individuals, objects, or places (Zaman, 2021). In Islamic education, the concept of blessings is often associated with the transmission of knowledge and the spiritual benefit derived from it. It is believed that blessings enhance the effectiveness, depth, and transformative power of the educational experience (Demirel & Sahib, 2015).

The relationship between esotericism and the existence of blessings in Islamic education lies in their interconnectedness. Esoteric teachings provide insights into the metaphysical aspects of Islamic beliefs, while the pursuit of blessings in education involves incorporating esoteric practices to enhance the spiritual dimension of learning. By recognizing the presence of blessings and seeking spiritual growth, individuals can deepen their connection with Allah and derive greater benefit from Islamic education (Hardaker & Sabki, 2018b).

Esoteric practices, including specific spiritual exercises, contemplation, and purification techniques, are believed to facilitate the attainment of blessings. In Islamic education,

esoteric teachings can be integrated to enhance the learning experience (Al Zeera, 2001). By incorporating practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), meditation, and spiritual purification, individuals can create an inner environment conducive to receiving blessings. In the realm of Islamic education, aspects of esotericism are achieved through *khidmah* or serving the teacher. This dedication is not only about readiness and volunteering to help teachers, but also as an internalization of the noble values that teachers practice in their students. By observing the teacher's behavior, students can emulate it and make it a role model. The esoteric approach acknowledges that the acquisition of knowledge is not limited to the intellectual realm but also involves spiritual growth and connection with the divine (Hardaker & Sabki, 2018a).

The metaphysical aspect of Islam recognizes the presence of divine blessings in various aspects of life, including education (Huda et al., 2016). Islamic education is seen as an opportunity to seek the blessings of Allah, which can lead to spiritual growth, wisdom, and transformation (Huda et al., 2017). By approaching education with sincerity, humility, and a desire for spiritual benefit, individuals can open themselves up to the blessings of knowledge. The belief in blessings encourages students and educators to engage in the learning process with an awareness of the divine presence and a sense of gratitude.

Islamic teachings consist of two aspects: the

exoteric (outward) aspect and the esoteric (inner) aspect (Calis, 2020). Shari'a, as knowledge about conditions, pillars, and things that cancel an act of worship, is called the exoteric aspect. In contrast, the meaning and wisdom of worship itself is an esoteric aspect. This esoteric aspect of Islam is called Sufism. As an esoteric aspect, Sufism also requires the implementation of the correct Shari'a (Mahyuddin et al., 2013).

The concept of the Islamization of knowledge, which focuses on the importance of the esoteric aspects of Islamic education, was put forward by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Al-Attas argued that Islamic education should not be limited to the mere transmission of information but should also encompass the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of knowledge (Ahmed, 2018). He stressed the importance of incorporating the esoteric aspects of Islamic teachings into the educational process.

According to al-Attas, the esoteric aspects of Islamic education, rooted in the spiritual and mystical traditions of Islam, provide a holistic framework for understanding the world and the purpose of knowledge (Hashim & Rossidy, 2000). He believed that the integration of esoteric teachings, such as the spiritual purification of the self, contemplation, and the pursuit of spiritual insight, would enhance the intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of individuals. By incorporating the esoteric aspects of Islamic teachings, al-Attas argued that Islamic education would foster a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between knowledge, the human self, and the

divine. This approach seeks to cultivate a comprehensive worldview that integrates both the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam, allowing individuals to derive spiritual benefit from their educational pursuits (Hardaker & Sabki, 2018b).

Al-Attas' perspective on the Islamization of Science can be seen as a reactionary stance while emphasizing the fundamental significance of education within Islam. His approach underscores the importance of maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between the inward, spiritual dimensions and the outward, practical aspects of Islamic Education (Al-Attas, 1980). In his prologue, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas explained human nature as the object of education before discussing the concept of education (Attas, 1984). He criticizes contemporary education, which is too focused on developing only the physical aspects of humans and leaving aside the spiritual aspects.

Islam explains more about the essence of knowledge and its urgency than other religions, cultures, and civilizations. This shows that science is important in building Islamic civilization; even science occupies a place after faith. At this point, the epistemology of science in the western and Islamic frameworks differs (Attas, 1984). The West started science with endless skepticism, while Islam made science aware of understanding the truth. Though apparently varied in substance, this exposition encompasses the nature of knowledge in its totality. The concept of knowledge in Islam,

in the view of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, not only plays a role in realizing world welfare goals, including social and economic aspects but primarily in achieving spiritual goals (Attas, 1984).

Al-Attas underlined that there is a difference between God's Knowledge and human knowledge about God, religion, and the world (Sassi, 2020). Knowledge can be understood as a gift from Allah called wisdom or *nūr*; it can also be in the form of something that humans get based on their intellectual efforts, whether through investigation, study, or experience, which is called science. It is generally understood that knowledge can be classified into essential elements; just as humans have spiritual and physical two elements, so knowledge is divided into these two elements: one is food and life for the soul, and the other is a provision with which one can equip the world's people in the pursuit of pragmatic goals (Sassi, 2020).

The first type of knowledge, rooted in understanding the Qur'an and Sunnah, encompasses the esoteric aspects of science. It emphasizes the implementation of sharia as a way of life, leading to wisdom. This knowledge relies on human devotion, spiritual strength, and divine grace. On the other hand, the second type of knowledge is acquired through experience, observation, and research, focusing on practical applications. This knowledge is obtained through rational inquiry, granted by God (Mahmudin et al., 2021). Both types of knowledge should be complementarily integrated, with conscious action, to achieve proper results. The ultimate

significance lies in the actions derived from these two types, revealing human wisdom and the profound connection between humanity and the divine. So, this knowledge becomes an important basis for the second type of science. If a man pursues the second kind of knowledge with the guiding spirit of the first kind, man will stay on his way, avoid getting caught in confusing paths, and become ensnared in a labyrinth of endless and aimless quests (Hamid, 2018).

The concept of Islamic education, which emphasizes esoteric aspects, differs from the concept of general education in several key ways. Islamic education with an emphasis on esoteric aspects seeks to integrate the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of learning (Sahin, 2018). It recognizes that education is not solely about acquiring knowledge and skills but also about cultivating a deeper understanding of the self, the divine, and the purpose of life. Esoteric teachings in Islamic education aim to foster spiritual growth, contemplation, and connection with Allah, alongside the acquisition of knowledge (Davids & Waghid, 2016).

In general education, the source of authority is often secular, based on empirical evidence, scientific research, and rational thinking. In contrast, Islamic education with an emphasis on esoteric aspects derives its authority from the Quran, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Hadith), and the spiritual insights of Islamic scholars (Al Zeera, 2001; Chowdhury, 2018). It places a significant emphasis on religious texts and the teachings

of the Islamic tradition as the foundation for knowledge and understanding.

Islamic education, with its esoteric focus, places a strong emphasis on moral and ethical development. It aims to instill virtuous qualities, such as humility, compassion, justice, and empathy, as integral aspects of education (Sahin, 2021). Islamic teachings provide guidance on ethical conduct and personal transformation, encouraging individuals to live a righteous and balanced life based on Islamic principles (Halstead, 2004).

Esoteric aspects in Islamic education emphasize the cultivation of a direct connection with the divine. It encourages individuals to develop a deeper spiritual awareness, engage in acts of worship, and seek a personal relationship with Allah. This spiritual connection is seen as essential for understanding the deeper meanings of knowledge and for achieving a transformative educational experience (Al Zeera, 2001).

While general education often focuses on personal and societal development, Islamic education with an esoteric emphasis goes beyond that. It emphasizes the ultimate goal of attaining closeness to Allah, seeking spiritual enlightenment, and achieving a state of inner harmony and tranquility (Sahin, 2018). The purpose of education is not just intellectual development but also spiritual growth and the realization of one's purpose in relation to Allah.

CONCLUSION

The research emphasizes the unique educational journey of Santri Musaidin and the significant role of *khidmah* in their development. Serving *khidmah* provides them with distinct learning schedules and methods that focus on character building and spiritual cleansing. The motivations behind their service vary, with some seeking materialistic benefits for a more decent livelihood, while others strive for the blessings associated with *khidmah*. The study highlights the tangible outcomes of this service, including positive behavioral changes, improved living conditions, economic well-being, and acceptance within the community. It underscores the importance of obedience to teachers and adherence to rules in Islamic boarding schools, which contribute to receiving blessings. Ultimately, the research highlights the transformative power of Islamic education in shaping not only knowledge but also the moral and spiritual growth of students, exemplified through the experiences of Santri Musaidin.

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