



Ruhul Ma'had Compass: Integrating Spirituality and Scientific Excellence in *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam* Malang

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ABSTRACT

Through an exploration of how value-centered frameworks could thoroughly influence student development in an Islamic boarding school context, the present study aims to address the ongoing disconnect between spiritual values and academic achievement in the realm of higher education settings. The purpose is to conceptualize and statistically examine the *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* as a paradigm of unifying spiritual values and student development in *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam* Malang. Utilizing the qualitative case study method of data collection, in which in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis are employed in conjunction with a theoretical application of spirituality theories, micro-foundational theories, and value-based education theories to uncover the underlying processes of value assimilation, the results of the present study indicate that *Ruhul Ma'had* serves as an ethical and intellectual guidance system in which the cognitive frameworks of the student are methodically imbued with essential values such as honesty, integrity, simplicity, respect, and independence, thereby informing student academic and life processes. Moreover, the *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam* Malang slogan of *amaliah agama, prestasi ilmiah, and kesiapan hidup* is reinterpreted from an essentially symbolic perspective to an instrumental model of unifying moral, intellectual, and practical competencies. The study reveals that *Ruhul Ma'had* Compass provides a unique micro-level theory of understanding the application of spirituality in higher education, which places *pesantren* as a relevant global example of value-integrated educational systems that go beyond the traditional dichotomy of the study of religion and scientific exploration.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, higher education worldwide has faced significant challenges marked by a mismatch between learning outcomes and the formation of students' religious character. Many educational institutions tend to prioritize cognitive excellence and technical skills, while ethical and spiritual dimensions are often treated as supplementary elements that are not structurally integrated. (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010; Palmer, 2007). This condition raises concerns about the purpose of education, where graduates possess strong academic competence but lack moral direction and comprehensive life readiness (Hakim, Zakiyatus Solihah, Ismail, Salim, & Prasetyo, 2024). In this context, the integration of spirituality and academics has become an increasingly important topic in contemporary educational discourse.

Within the tradition of Islamic education, particularly in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), the integration of spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions has long been a foundational principle for shaping the ideal human being (*insān kāmil*). *Pesantren* function not only as institutions for transmitting religious knowledge but also as arenas for instilling values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), truthfulness (*sidq*), simplicity (*basāṭah*), proper conduct (*adab*), and independence (*istiqlāl*) (Nuriyah, Rafaro, Azizah, & Bakar, 2026). However, most studies on *pesantren* remain descriptive and normative, lacking detailed explanations of how these values are internalized and transformed into students' learning behavior and existential readiness. (Isbah, 2020).

On the other hand, there are recent developments in educational theory that emphasize the importance of the integration of cognition, emotion, and morality in the process of learning. Value-based education, for instance, underscores the significance of values as a basis for developing individual behavior and institutional culture. (Saikhudin & Yeli, 2026). Micro-foundations theory, on the other hand, is a theory in the social sciences that seeks to explain the macro-foundations of human behavior in terms of micro-foundations in the human individual, such as cognition, motivation, and decision-making. (Felin, Foss, Heimeriks, & Madsen, 2012). The integration of Islamic perspectives with micro-foundational theory in higher education, however, remains an area that is still unexplored.

Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang is a unique institution that seeks to integrate academic life in university with character development through the *pesantren* approach. Founded by KH. A. Hasyim Muzadi, *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang* focuses on three main pillars: religious practice (*amaliah agama*), academic achievement (*prestasi ilmiah*), and life readiness (*kesiapan hidup*). Moreover, the values of *ruh al-ma'had*, such as sincerity, honesty, humility, courtesy, and self-reliance, form the basis of the students' lives. However, there is still no study that conceptualizes the role of these values as an integrated system in directing the students' lives. This study is grounded in the assumption that *ruh al-ma'had* values function not merely as ethical norms but as a guiding system that shapes students' cognition, attitudes, and actions in responding to academic and social challenges. In this regard, the concept of the *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* is introduced as a novel theoretical model that explains how spiritual values are internalized into cognitive frameworks that guide decision-making and behavior. This approach differs from previous studies that tend to treat spirituality as a static element rather than as a dynamic process in character formation.

More specifically, this research seeks to answer the central question: how do the values of *ruh al-ma'had* at *Pesantren Mahasiswa Al-Hikam Malang* become internalized and function as a guiding system in integrating spirituality with academic excellence? This question is significant as it contributes to the development of higher education models that produce not only academically competent graduates but also individuals with moral maturity and readiness to navigate the complexities of life. Furthermore, this study also responds to ongoing debates in educational literature regarding the possibility of operationalizing spirituality within formal education systems. Some scholars argue that spirituality is inherently personal and difficult to measure, while others suggest that spiritual values can be internalized through social practices and institutional structures. By analyzing the *Al-Hikam* case, this research seeks to demonstrate that spirituality is not only operationalizable but can also serve as a foundational element in constructing integrated educational systems.

The main objective of this study is to develop the *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* as a micro-foundational conceptual framework that illustrates the integration of spirituality, academic excellence, and life readiness within a pesantren-based higher education environment. This study also aims to contribute theoretically to the literature on Islamic education and higher education in general, while offering practical implications for the development of value-based educational models on a global scale. Therefore, this study concludes that the integration of spirituality and scientific knowledge is not only possible but can also be systematically explained through a micro-foundational approach. The concept of the *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* is expected to provide a novel contribution to educational discourse, particularly in addressing the dichotomy between moral and intellectual dimensions in higher education.

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative method with an integrated case study design to examine the ways in which *Ruhul Ma'had* is valued and functions as a guide in the integration of spirituality and academic excellence among students of Islamic Boarding School Al-Hikam Malang. The adopted method provides an opportunity for researchers to understand phenomena in their context comprehensively and refer to the meaning from the perspective of participants. (Yin, 2018). The research process was carried out over approximately eight months, beginning from exploration and data collection up to data analysis and validation of findings. The research location was Islamic Boarding School Al-Hikam Malang, which was purposively selected due to its distinctive characteristics as a pioneer institution in integrated higher education and character development based on values. The subjects of the study consisted of three main groups: (1) administrators and managers of the Islamic boarding school (kiai, ustaz, and core administrators); (2) active santri students from various higher education institutions; and (3) alumni who had completed their education and were active in the professional world. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on direct experience related to the process of value internalization, as well as snowball sampling to expand the depth of information until data saturation was reached. The total number of informants in this study reached 18 participants. (Suharyat, 2022).

Data collection techniques were conducted through a triangulation approach consisting of: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore direct experiences, personal meanings, and interpretations of values by informants; (2) participatory observation of students' daily activities, such as worship, scientific discussions, and social interactions; and (3) document analysis related to the curriculum, Islamic boarding school guidelines, institutional motto, and activity archives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview guide was arranged based on a theoretical framework of value-based education and microfoundations, with particular attention to the process of value internalization, cognitive formation schemes, and their impact on academic behavior and life readiness. The main instrument in this study was the researcher, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document analysis protocols (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For sharper analysis, coding techniques were applied using a hybrid approach, combining deductive coding based on theories such as values, cognition, and behavior, with inductive coding derived from field findings. The data analysis process followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

In addition, pattern matching between empirical findings and the conceptual framework of the *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* was conducted to test the suitability and strength of the developed model. To ensure the validity and credibility of the research, several strategies were applied, namely: (1) triangulation of sources and methods to ensure data consistency; (2) member checking through participant verification of researchers' interpretations; (3) prolonged engagement in the field to understand the context more deeply; and (4) peer debriefing with fellow academics to reduce subjective bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers also continuously applied reflexivity to recognize their position and possible biases throughout the research process. Through this methodological approach, the study not only offers empirical descriptions but also develops a conceptually robust

and scientifically accountable framework. This approach provides opportunities to investigate deeply how values are internalized at the micro level and connected to institutional dynamics within the context of higher education rooted in Islamic boarding school traditions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Internalization of Ruhul Ma'had Values as a Moral Intellectual Compass.

Research results show that the values *Ruhul Ma'had* in Islamic boarding schools, Al-Hikam Malang, students do not function just as norm ethical, but as a system of navigation that is an active form of cognitive and behavioral orientation for students. Based on an interview with a caregiver, the findings indicate that values internalized through the *Ruhul Ma'had* framework function not merely as normative teachings but as a directional system that shapes students' patterns of thinking and behavior in daily life. Based on observations of students' activities in the Islamic Boarding School Al-Hikam Malang, the internalization of values occurs continuously through habituation processes, exemplary conduct from the kiai and administrators, and intensive social interaction among students. These processes are reflected in routine religious practices, scientific discussions, communal activities, and academic disciplines that collectively reinforce the integration between spirituality and academic responsibility.

Data from interviews with students and administrators further demonstrate that the internalization process develops gradually from understanding values at the cognitive level toward their application in practical life situations. One informant explained that the values taught in the pesantren environment are not only discussed in formal religious studies but are also consistently practiced in everyday interactions and decision-making processes. This finding was strengthened by participatory observations showing that students tend to refer to pesantren values when responding to academic, organizational, and social challenges.

"Nilai seperti ikhlas dan jujur itu bukan hanya diajarkan, tetapi harus menjadi arah hidup santri. Kalau tidak menjadi arah, maka ilmu hanya akan menjadi alat, bukan jalan."

Document analysis of pesantren guidelines, institutional mottos, and educational programs also confirms that the institutional culture systematically encourages students to transform values into behavioral orientations. Analytically, the internalization process can be understood through four interconnected stages: (1) values are introduced through religious learning and scientific discourse; (2) values are practiced through daily activities and social interaction; (3) repeated practice forms internalized cognitive schemas; and (4) these schemas subsequently influence patterns of decision-making and behavior. In this context, the *Ruhul Ma'had* Compass functions as a value-based orientation system that connects moral understanding with consistent action in both academic and social life.

The findings indicate that the *Ruhul Ma'had* Compass functions as a value-based orientation system shaping students' patterns of thinking and behavior in daily life. Based on participatory observations conducted during religious activities, scientific discussions, and social interactions, the internalization of values occurred continuously through habituation, exemplary conduct from kiai and administrators, and collective student culture. Students were observed practicing values such as sincerity, discipline, simplicity, and responsibility not only in religious activities but also in academic and organizational contexts (Field Observation, 2025). Interviews with students and pesantren administrators revealed that the process of value internalization develops gradually from conceptual understanding toward behavioral consistency. One student explained that the values taught in the pesantren environment become "guidelines for making decisions in academic and social life" (Interview with Student, 2025). Similarly, administrators emphasized that institutional activities were intentionally designed to ensure that values are repeatedly practiced in everyday interactions (Interview with Administrator, 2025).

Document analysis of pesantren guidelines, institutional mottos, and student development programs further confirmed that the institutional culture systematically integrates spirituality with academic responsibility (Document Analysis, 2025). Analytically, the transformation process can be

understood through several interconnected stages: values are introduced through religious learning and scientific discourse, practiced in daily institutional life, internalized into students' cognitive structures, and eventually manifested in behavioral patterns and decision-making processes.

Transformation of Institutional Motto into Operational System

One of the main findings of this study is that the institutional motto of *religious practice, academic excellence, and life readiness* has been transformed from a symbolic slogan into an integrated operational system embedded in the daily educational practices of Islamic Boarding School Al-Hikam Malang. Based on participatory observations, these three dimensions were consistently reflected in students' academic activities, religious practices, organizational involvement, and social interactions within the pesantren environment. The findings indicate that the institutional motto functions not only as a philosophical statement but also as a practical framework guiding the formation of students' character, intellectual capacity, and social readiness. Interviews with pesantren leaders further confirmed the integrated nature of these dimensions. H. Nurkholis, S.Sos., explained:

This statement demonstrates that the three dimensions are perceived as interconnected and mutually reinforcing components within the pesantren educational system. Field observations revealed that religious practices (*amaliah agama*) function as the moral and spiritual foundation shaping students' integrity and discipline in everyday life. Academic excellence (*prestasi ilmiah*) contributes to the development of intellectual capacity, critical thinking, and scientific orientation through formal learning activities, discussions, and academic achievement programs. Meanwhile, life readiness (*kesiapan hidup*) is reflected in students' organizational experiences, communication skills, social adaptability, and practical competencies developed through collective activities and community engagement (Field Observation, 2025).

"Tiga hal itu bukan pilihan, tapi satu kesatuan. Santri tidak boleh hanya pintar secara akademik tanpa amal, dan tidak cukup hanya baik tanpa kompetensi hidup." (Interview with Pesantren Leader, 2025)

Document analysis of institutional guidelines, student development programs, and pesantren activity reports further confirmed that these three dimensions are systematically integrated into the educational process rather than implemented separately (Document Analysis, 2025). The findings suggest that the interaction between religious values, intellectual development, and life skills produces a holistic educational model in which student success is measured not only by academic achievement but also by moral integrity, social responsibility, and readiness to engage with societal realities.

Micro Foundational Mechanism of Value Internalization

At the micro level, studies have found that the process of internalization is continuously marked by complex cognitive mechanisms. The marks are not only perceived by the santri in a passive way but also in a meaningful way. This is an indication of the transition from external control to internal control. This is an important indicator of the successful internalization of value. The process of this is as follows: 1) The development of awareness and self-awareness, 2) The integration of value in the cognitive structure, and 3) The congruence of values with behavior. *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* works on the micro-level as the connecting mechanism, mark, and behavior. Findings research also shows that internalization marks its own impact in the long term for readiness for life and responsibility, and answers alumni socially. Zaidun Naim Alumni state:

"Awalnya kami menjalankan aturan karena kewajiban, tapi lama-lama jadi kesadaran sendiri. Misalnya, disiplin belajar itu bukan karena takut, tapi karena merasa itu bagian dari tanggung jawab."

"Yang paling terasa setelah keluar dari Al-Hikam bukan hanya ilmu, tapi cara berpikir dan bersikap. Kita lebih siap menghadapi masalah dan tidak mudah goyah."

This matter shows that internalized values during my time at the Islamic boarding school became important capital in the face complexity life. Impact This is seen in various aspects: 1) Ability

adaptation in the world of work, 2) Maturity in taking decision, 3) Sensitivity to social problems. Based on findings research, the framework *Ruhul Ma'had Compass* can be visualized as follows:



Figure 3. Ruhul Model Ma'had Compass

This model shows that the mark is in the center system, which then influences cognitive processes and produces academic behavior as well as life readiness. Figure 4 presents the mapping of core values, cognitive mechanisms, and behavioral outcomes identified during the research process. The categorization was developed through triangulation of interview data, participatory observations, and institutional document analysis conducted at Islamic Boarding School Al-Hikam Malang. Interviews with students, pesantren administrators, and alumni revealed that values such as sincerity (ikhlas), honesty (jujur), simplicity (sederhana), politeness (santun), and independence (mandiri) were consistently emphasized as the foundation of students' character formation (Interview Data, 2025).

Participatory observations further demonstrated that these values were not only verbally taught but also practiced in daily academic, religious, and social activities within the pesantren environment. For example, sincerity was reflected in students' consistency in learning activities without external pressure, honesty appeared in academic responsibility and interpersonal interaction, while simplicity and politeness were observed in students' communication styles and daily lifestyles (Field Observation, 2025).

Document analysis of pesantren guidelines, institutional mottos, and student development programs also confirmed that these core values were systematically integrated into educational activities and organizational culture (Document Analysis, 2025). Based on the triangulation process, the findings indicate that each value contributes to the formation of specific cognitive mechanisms that subsequently influence students' behavioral orientation. Therefore, Table 1 illustrates not merely a conceptual framework, but an empirical mapping derived from the integration of multiple data sources during the research process.

Analysis of Value Mapping and Cognitive Formation

The findings indicate that the values developed within the Ruhul Ma'had environment are not only understood as religious teachings but also function as cognitive orientations that influence students' ways of thinking and behaving in everyday life. Based on interviews, observations, and institutional document analysis, several core values consistently appeared as the foundation of students' personal and academic development. First, the value of ikhlas (sincerity) was reflected in students' willingness to carry out academic and organizational responsibilities without expecting external rewards or recognition. Observations showed that many students remained actively involved in pesantren and campus activities despite limited supervision or appreciation. Interviews with students revealed that sincerity was understood as part of worship and self-discipline, shaping internal motivation in learning and social participation (Interview with Student, 2025).

Second, the value of jujur (honesty) emerged as an important moral foundation in academic life. Informants emphasized that honesty was continuously reinforced through religious advice, institutional culture, and daily interaction within the pesantren environment. This value was reflected

in students' efforts to avoid plagiarism, maintain trust, and behave responsibly in academic assignments. Field observations further indicated that honesty was closely related to students' moral consideration before making decisions or taking actions (Field Observation, 2025). Third, the value of *sederhana* (simplicity) was associated with students' ability to manage priorities and maintain discipline in daily life. Observations revealed that students were encouraged to live modestly, avoid excessive lifestyles, and focus on long-term educational goals. This process gradually shaped self-control and disciplined behavior, particularly in balancing academic responsibilities, organizational involvement, and spiritual practices.

Fourth, the value of *santun* (politeness) was reflected in students' communication patterns and social interactions. Participatory observations demonstrated that respect toward teachers, peers, and community members became an important aspect of the *pesantren* culture. Students were trained to maintain empathy, mutual respect, and harmonious interaction within a socially and academically diverse environment. Fifth, the value of *mandiri* (independence) appeared through students' capacity to take responsibility for academic tasks, personal discipline, and organizational commitments without excessive dependence on direct supervision. Interviews with administrators indicated that students were continuously encouraged to develop initiative and problem-solving abilities as preparation for wider social and professional life.

Overall, the findings suggest that the *Ruhul Ma'had* Compass represents an integrated process in which spiritual values become connected to students' cognitive formation and behavioral orientation. In this context, spirituality does not function merely as a symbolic or theological dimension, but also as a practical framework guiding students' academic attitudes, social behavior, and life readiness. The internalization of values, cognitive formation, and behavioral practice, therefore, operate as interconnected dimensions within the educational culture of Islamic Boarding School Al-Hikam Malang.

Discussion

Internalization of *Ruhul Ma'had* Values as Cognitive Navigation

The findings demonstrate that the internalization of *Ruhul Ma'had* values extends beyond normative religious instruction and functions as a cognitive navigation system influencing students' ways of thinking, decision-making processes, and academic behavior. Data obtained from observations, interviews, and institutional documentation indicate that the process of value internalization occurs gradually through habituation, exemplary leadership, and intensive social interaction within the *pesantren* environment. These repeated practices eventually shape students' cognitive schema, which subsequently guides behavioral orientation in both academic and social contexts.

This finding supports the perspective of Berger and Luckmann (1966), who argue that values become socially internalized through continuous interaction and institutional habituation. In the context of Islamic boarding school education, the internalization process is strengthened by the integration of religious practices into students' daily lives, enabling values to move from abstract principles into practical behavioral orientations. Interview data with students further revealed that values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), honesty (*jujur*), simplicity (*sederhana*), politeness (*santun*), and independence (*mandiri*) gradually become internal standards for evaluating actions and responding to challenges. From a cognitive perspective, the findings also align with the social cognitive theory proposed by (Amsari, Wahyuni, & Fadhilaturrahmi, 2024; Bandura, 1986), emphasizing that behavior is shaped through reciprocal interaction between environment, cognition, and social learning. The *pesantren* environment provides a collective moral atmosphere in which students continuously observe, imitate, and reinforce value-oriented behavior. In this regard, *Ruhul Ma'had* functions not merely as a symbolic institutional philosophy but as a cognitive framework that organizes moral reasoning and behavioral consistency.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that students who successfully internalize *Ruhul Ma'had* values tend to demonstrate stronger academic resilience, emotional regulation, and self-discipline.

(Ayun, Taufik, & Ruhaena, 2024). This finding reinforces previous studies highlighting that spirituality-based education contributes positively to students' self-regulation and psychological development. (Al-Attas, 1991; Nasr, 1987). However, this study extends earlier discussions by demonstrating that spiritual values operate not only at the moral level but also at the cognitive level, influencing how students interpret academic responsibilities and life challenges. Therefore, the Ruhul Ma'had Compass model proposed in this study may be understood as a value-based cognitive navigation system that bridges spirituality, cognition, and behavior within the context of higher education rooted in pesantren traditions.

Transformation of Institutional Motto into an Integrated Educational System

This study finds that the institutional motto of Al-Hikam Islamic Boarding School, religious practice, academic excellence, and life readiness have been transformed from a symbolic slogan into an integrated operational educational system embedded within students' daily experiences. Interviews with pesantren leaders, administrators, and students reveal that these three dimensions are treated as inseparable components of holistic education rather than isolated educational targets. The dimension of religious practice functions as the moral foundation shaping students' spiritual discipline, self-control, and ethical awareness. Daily worship activities, collective prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and moral guidance become mechanisms through which religious values are continuously reinforced. Meanwhile, academic excellence is developed through scientific discussions, intellectual traditions, literacy culture, and encouragement toward academic achievement. The dimension of life readiness is manifested through organizational involvement, leadership training, communication skills, and social engagement, preparing students for broader societal realities.

These findings support the concept of holistic Islamic education, which emphasizes balanced development between spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions of human life. (Al-Attas, 1991). The educational system implemented at Al-Hikam reflects the Islamic educational principle that knowledge should not only produce intellectual competence but also moral integrity and social responsibility. In this regard, the integration of spirituality and academic excellence becomes a distinctive characteristic differentiating pesantren-based higher education from purely secular educational models.

The findings also resonate with previous research emphasizing that Islamic educational institutions achieve stronger character formation when academic systems are integrated with value-based habituation and social environments. (Anam & Ali, 2026; Muhaimin, 2019; Mulyasa, 2017). However, this study contributes further by demonstrating that institutional mottos can function as operational systems influencing institutional culture, cognitive orientation, and behavioral formation simultaneously. Critically, the transformation of institutional values into operational educational systems indicates that successful character education requires structural integration rather than merely rhetorical affirmation. At Al-Hikam, institutional values are reproduced through academic culture, organizational systems, leadership models, and social interactions, creating what may be described as an ecosystem of value internalization.

Spiritual Values, Cognitive Mechanisms, and Behavioral Formation

The findings reveal that each core value within Ruhul Ma'had corresponds to specific cognitive mechanisms that subsequently influence students' behavioral patterns. The value of sincerity (ikhlas) is associated with intrinsic motivation, encouraging students to engage in learning activities without excessive dependence on external rewards or recognition. Honesty (jujur) relates closely to moral reasoning, shaping students' academic integrity and discouraging practices such as plagiarism or academic dishonesty. Simplicity (sederhana) functions as cognitive control, enabling students to prioritize essential goals and reduce distractions in academic life.

In addition, politeness (santun) is strongly connected to social cognition, particularly the ability to understand others' perspectives and maintain harmonious social interaction within diverse campus environments. Independence (mandiri) reflects executive functioning, especially in relation to

self-management, responsibility, initiative, and task completion without excessive supervision. These findings support contemporary cognitive psychology perspectives, suggesting that values and cognition are interconnected dimensions influencing human behaviour. (Baumeister & Vohs, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, this study extends previous scholarship by demonstrating that spiritual values function not merely as ethical principles but also as cognitive structures shaping behavioral orientation in educational settings.

The triangulation of interview, observational, and documentary data further indicates that students with stronger internalization of Ruhul Ma'had values tend to exhibit more stable behavioral consistency in both academic and social contexts. They show stronger learning commitment, greater emotional resilience, and more adaptive social behavior. This finding aligns with previous studies arguing that spirituality contributes positively to self-regulation and academic persistence. (Britt, Wilkins, & Davis, 2017; King & Boyatzis, 2015). Critically, the study suggests that spirituality should not be positioned as separate from cognitive development. Instead, spiritual values may strengthen cognitive mechanisms by providing moral orientation, emotional stability, and behavioral direction. This integrative relationship between spirituality and cognition constitutes one of the main scientific contributions of this research.

Scientific Contribution of the Ruhul Ma'had Compass Model

Based on the empirical findings and theoretical analysis, this study proposes the Ruhul Ma'had Compass Model as an integrative conceptual framework connecting spiritual values, cognitive mechanisms, and behavioral formation within pesantren-based higher education. Existing studies on Islamic character education generally emphasize moral instruction, habituation, or spiritual discipline separately. Meanwhile, studies in cognitive psychology often focus on mental processes without sufficiently incorporating spiritual dimensions into behavioral analysis. This study bridges these perspectives by demonstrating that spiritual values internalized through institutional culture can shape cognitive schema, which subsequently influence behavioral consistency and academic orientation.

The model highlights three interconnected dimensions. First, spiritual values function as navigational principles providing moral direction and existential meaning. Second, cognitive mechanisms act as internal processing systems transforming values into patterns of reasoning, emotional regulation, and behavioral decision-making. Third, behavioral formation emerges as the observable manifestation of the interaction between spirituality and cognition. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic educational psychology by offering a more integrative understanding of how spirituality operates within cognitive and behavioral processes. The findings also expand discussions on pesantren-based higher education by positioning spirituality not only as a moral doctrine but as an active psychological and cognitive system influencing academic performance and life readiness.

Practically, the Ruhul Ma'had Compass model provides an alternative framework for educational institutions seeking to integrate character education, spirituality, and academic development into a coherent educational ecosystem. The model may serve as a conceptual foundation for designing value-based educational programs that simultaneously strengthen moral integrity, intellectual competence, and social responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of spirituality and academic excellence within the ecosystem of Islamic boarding school-based higher education is not formed incidentally, but emerges through a systematic process of value internalization embedded in institutional culture and daily student life. The findings reveal that the core values of Ruhul Ma'had, namely sincerity (ikhlas), honesty (jujur), simplicity (sederhana), politeness (santun), and independence (mandiri), function as a navigational system shaping students' cognitive schema and behavioral orientation. Through habituation, exemplary practices, organizational involvement, and social interaction, these values

gradually transform into internal cognitive mechanisms that guide students' academic decisions, moral reasoning, self-regulation, and social behavior. As a result, the Ruhul Ma'had Compass model offers a conceptual contribution by positioning spirituality not merely as moral doctrine, but as a cognitive and behavioral navigation system that strengthens academic integrity, resilience, and life readiness among students in pesantren-based higher education institutions.

The study further indicates that value-based education becomes more effective when institutional values are operationalized through integrated educational systems rather than limited to symbolic or theoretical discourse. In this context, curriculum design, organizational culture, lecturer exemplarity, and student development systems play significant roles in sustaining the internalization process. Therefore, Islamic higher education institutions are encouraged to integrate Ruhul Ma'had values into learning processes, strengthen student organizational ecosystems as spaces for leadership and executive function development, reinforce lecturers' roles as living models of institutional values, and utilize digital technology to support character monitoring and student guidance systems. Although the Ruhul Ma'had Compass model demonstrates strong conceptual relevance within the context of this study, future research is needed to further examine its validity through interdisciplinary approaches, including neuro-pedagogy and digital psychometric analysis, in order to deepen understanding of the relationship between spirituality, cognition, and behavioral formation in Islamic higher education.

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