

# The Integration of Islamic Essentialism and Existentialism in the Makhadiyah Educational System at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of Islamic essentialist and existentialist values within the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School. The research is motivated by the need for an Islamic educational model that maintains spiritual authenticity while remaining responsive to contemporary social realities. The study aims to analyze how these two philosophical orientations are integrated into pesantren educational practices and how they contribute to santri character formation. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a case-study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and institutional documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion verification. The findings reveal that Islamic essentialism is reflected in the preservation of turats, cultivation of adab, and continuous spiritual habituation that strengthen personal piety. Meanwhile, Islamic existentialism is implemented through community-oriented programs such as guru tugas, nasyrul 'ilmi, and safari dakwah, which encourage self-actualization and social responsibility. The integration of these dimensions forms a holistic educational paradigm that balances spirituality, intellectuality, and humanity in shaping socially transformative santri. This study contributes theoretically by offering an integrative framework that bridges Islamic essentialism and existentialism within pesantren educational practices. Practically, the findings provide an alternative educational model for Islamic institutions seeking to preserve religious values while fostering students' social engagement and contextual awareness in contemporary society.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation in responding to the social, technological, and cultural changes of the twenty-first century (Astuti, 2019). According to EMIS data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the 2024/2025 academic year, there are more than 42,000 active Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) across Indonesia. These institutions collectively provide education and care for approximately 3.22 million students (*santri*) during the first semester of the academic year (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2024). This figure not only demonstrates the vitality of pesantren institutions but also confirms their strategic role as centers of moral, spiritual, and social education. Amid the rapid currents of globalization and value secularization, pesantren face a dual challenge: preserving the classical Islamic scholarly tradition while simultaneously adapting to the demands of modern society (Hasan, 2023; Rahman, 1982). This condition raises a fundamental question regarding how Islamic education can remain rooted in essential values derived from revelation and morality while still providing space for human beings to develop autonomously, reflectively, and contextually. Within the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, this issue may be approached through the integration of Islamic essentialism and Islamic existentialism. Islamic essentialism emphasizes the preservation of permanent values

originating from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the intellectual traditions of Muslim scholars. (S M N Al-Attas, 1980) explains that the ultimate purpose of Islamic education is *ta'dīb*, namely the formation of civilized human beings who position knowledge, action, and ethics proportionally. In contrast, Islamic existentialism views education as a process of cultivating human consciousness in order to actualize divine values within real-life experiences. (Tafsir, 2012) argues that Islamic education should not merely transfer knowledge but should also guide individuals toward existential awareness as God's vicegerents (*khalifah*) on earth. The integration of these two paradigms is therefore essential because Islamic education requires not only a strong foundation of enduring values but also the capacity to respond to evolving social realities. Several studies within the last decade have demonstrated that pesantren institutions have developed in terms of management, technology, and character education. (Muchasan & Rohmawan, 2024) examined technological adaptation in pesantren as a response to educational modernization. (Maulana Malik Ibrahim & Mukhsin, 2025) explored the integration of traditional and modern methods in the teaching of classical Islamic texts, while (Adi, 2022) highlighted the cultivation of tolerance values through *bahs al-masā'il* activities. Furthermore, (Ulfan, Hasan, & Sugiran, 2023) emphasized the continuing relevance of religion-based character education in the digital era. Nevertheless, these studies tend to focus on technical, managerial, or pedagogical dimensions and rarely discuss explicitly the integration of Islamic essentialist and existentialist values within pesantren educational practices.

Based on the existing literature, a significant research gap remains within the discourse of Islamic educational philosophy, particularly regarding how Islamic essentialist and existentialist values are practically integrated within pesantren educational systems. Previous studies have generally positioned pesantren either as institutions preserving Islamic traditions or as adaptive institutions responding to modernization (Solichin, 2012). Existing research has predominantly focused on managerial transformation, technological adaptation, and pedagogical practices, while limited attention has been given to the philosophical integration of enduring Islamic values and students' existential development within educational practice. Consequently, there remains insufficient understanding of how these educational orientations interact in shaping students' character and social awareness within pesantren contexts. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to develop an integrative perspective on pesantren education through the lens of Islamic essentialism and existentialism. Unlike previous studies that tend to examine these paradigms separately, this study investigates how both orientations are simultaneously institutionalized within the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School. This study offers a conceptual contribution by proposing an educational model that integrates the preservation of fundamental Islamic values with the cultivation of self-awareness and social engagement, thereby expanding contemporary discussions on Islamic educational philosophy and pesantren transformation. The makhadiyah educational system at PPNC was selected because it possesses an integrative character that emphasizes the balance between spirituality, intellectuality, and social responsibility. This system is implemented through spiritual habituation, the study of classical Islamic texts, deliberative forums, leadership training, and community service programs such as *guru tugas*, *nasyrul 'ilmi*, and *safari dakwah*. These practices indicate that pesantren function not merely as institutions for preserving Islamic traditions but also as spaces for the formation of social awareness and self-actualization among students. Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze how the integration of Islamic essentialist and existentialist values is implemented within the makhadiyah educational system at PPNC Bangkalan and how such integration contributes to the formation of students' character. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the discourse of Islamic educational philosophy, particularly in relation to the development of an integrative pesantren-based educational paradigm. Practically, the findings are expected to provide a conceptual reference for Islamic educational

institutions in designing educational systems capable of preserving spiritual values while simultaneously fostering contextual social awareness in the modern era.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to examine comprehensively the integration of Islamic essentialist and existentialist values within the makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School. A qualitative approach was selected because the research focused on understanding meanings, experiences, values, and educational processes embedded within the daily life of the pesantren rather than on numerical measurement. As stated by (Creswell & Poth, 2017), qualitative research emphasizes an in-depth understanding of human experiences within specific social and cultural contexts. In this study, the researchers acted as the primary instruments in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data directly in the field. The research site was selected purposively because PPNC represents one of the pesantren institutions in Madura that actively integrates classical Islamic scholarship, spiritual habituation, and community-based educational practices within its makhadiyah system. The pesantren accommodates more than two thousand active students (*santri*) and organizes various educational, spiritual, and social programs, including *nasyrul 'ilmi*, *guru tugas*, and *safari dakwah*. These characteristics make PPNC relevant as a research setting for exploring the synthesis between value preservation and existential awareness in contemporary Islamic education. Research participants consisted of pesantren caregivers (*pengasuh*), religious teachers (*ustadz*), student organization administrators, and active santri involved in makhadiyah educational activities and community service programs. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and understanding of the educational system under study (Ardiansyah, Risnita, & Jailani, 2023). Primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing participants to explain their experiences, perspectives, and interpretations regarding the implementation of the makhadiyah system. In addition, participatory observation was conducted by attending various educational and religious activities such as classical text studies (*pengajian kitab*), *bahtsul masā'il* forums, congregational worship, spiritual habituation, and leadership training activities. According to (Sugiyono, 2020), participatory observation enables researchers to understand actions and social meanings directly within their natural contexts. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement, responsibilities, and understanding of the Makhadiyah educational system. A total of seven key informants participated in this study, representing different educational roles within the pesantren environment. The diversity of participants was intended to obtain comprehensive perspectives regarding the implementation of educational practices, institutional values, and student experiences within the Makhadiyah system. Detailed information regarding research informants is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Research Informants

No	Informant	Position	Role in Research
1	A. F. Zubair	Islamic Scholar (Kiai/Pengasuh)	Provided perspectives on educational philosophy and institutional vision
2	Hizam	Senior Teacher	Explained instructional processes and implementation of Islamic values
3	Munir, M.	Senior Teacher	Provided information regarding learning practices and character formation
4	Imad	Boarding Administrator	Explained student management and educational activities
5	Luki, M.	Boarding Administrator	Provided information regarding dormitory culture and student development

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6	Nawawi	Educational Administrator	Explained institutional educational programs and administration
7	Malik, A.	Boarder (Santri)	Shared experiences regarding participation in the Makhadiyah system

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The inclusion of participants from different institutional positions enabled data triangulation and facilitated a richer understanding of how Islamic essentialist and existentialist values were implemented across educational practices. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents and supporting literature, including the PPNC socialization handbook, activity archives, reports of *guru tugas* programs, photographs, internal regulations, and relevant scholarly publications related to Islamic educational philosophy and pesantren studies. These documents were used to strengthen, complement, and verify findings obtained from interviews and field observations. Data collection procedures were conducted through three main stages: observation, interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2022). Observations were carried out to obtain factual information regarding students' educational routines, spiritual practices, and patterns of social interaction within the pesantren environment. Interviews were used to explore participants' views, educational values, and experiences related to the implementation of the makhadiyah system. Documentation served to support data validation through institutional records and written evidence. All collected data were recorded systematically in field notes and organized according to the focus of the study. Data analysis was conducted interactively following the qualitative analysis model proposed by (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting and categorizing information relevant to the research objectives, while data display was presented in descriptive narrative form to identify patterns and relationships among findings. The analytical process was conducted simultaneously with data collection to allow continuous verification and interpretation of emerging findings. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the data, this study applied source and method triangulation techniques by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and institutional documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through these procedures, the study sought to provide a comprehensive and credible understanding of how Islamic essentialist and existentialist values are integrated within the makhadiyah educational system at PPNC across spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### RESULT

##### 3.1 The Structure of the Makhadiyah Educational System at PPNC

The Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School (PPNC) Bangkalan represents an integrated educational model designed to develop students holistically through spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions. Unlike educational systems that emphasize cognitive achievement alone, the Makhadiyah system combines religious habituation, classical Islamic scholarship, and community engagement within a comprehensive boarding-school environment. This educational structure is implemented continuously through daily activities and institutional programs that shape students' character formation and social awareness (Observation, 2025). Based on field observations and institutional documentation, the educational process in PPNC operates through a twenty-four-hour educational system in which all student activities are considered part of the learning process. Educational activities are not limited to classroom instruction but extend to worship practices, social interaction, leadership experiences, and community service. According to the PPNC institutional guideline, the Makhadiyah system emphasizes three interconnected dimensions: spiritual formation, intellectual development, and social responsibility (*Buku Panduan*

*Sosialisasi PPNC*, 2024). The first dimension, spiritual formation, focuses on strengthening students' religious consciousness through habitual worship and moral discipline. Activities observed during fieldwork included congregational prayers, tahajud prayer, collective wirid, ratib recitations, Qur'anic readings, and spiritual mentoring sessions conducted regularly within dormitory environments (Observation, 2025). One boarding administrator explained: "Pembentukan santri dimulai dari pembiasaan ibadah dan kedisiplinan spiritual, karena karakter tidak dibangun melalui teori saja tetapi melalui latihan sehari-hari." (Luki, 2025). These practices indicate that spiritual activities are not supplementary programs but constitute the foundational structure of educational life in the pesantren. The second dimension, intellectual development, is implemented through the study of *turats* (classical Islamic texts) using traditional learning methods such as *bandongan* and *sorogan*. Students study various classical books including *Safinatun Najah*, *Fathul Qarib*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Tafsir Jalalain*, and *Ihya' Ulumuddin*. Based on classroom observations, the *bandongan* method allows teachers to explain texts collectively while students annotate and listen carefully, whereas *sorogan* emphasizes individual reading and direct teacher correction (*Observasi*, 2025). In addition to kitab studies, intellectual activities also include *bahtsul masā'il*, public speaking training, and discussion forums designed to strengthen analytical and communication skills (Munir, 2025). The third dimension, social responsibility, aims to prepare students to become active contributors within society through community-oriented programs. The Makhadiyah system institutionalizes social engagement through *guru tugas*, *nasyrul 'ilmi*, and *safari dakwah* programs. According to institutional records, in 2024 approximately 135 students were assigned as educational assistants and religious preachers across twenty-one regions in Bangkalan and surrounding areas (PPNC Documentation, *Program Guru Tugas Report*, 2024). These programs provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and engage directly with broader social realities. The overall structure of the Makhadiyah educational system is summarized below:

**Table 2.** Dimensions of the Makhadiyah Educational System at PPNC

Dimension	Educational Activities	Educational Orientation
Spiritual	Tahajud, wirid, ratib, congregational worship	Islamic Essentialism
Intellectual	Kitab studies, bandongan, sorogan, bahtsul masā'il	Essentialism–Existentialism
Social	Guru tugas, nasyrul 'ilmi, safari dakwah	Islamic Existentialism

The findings indicate that the Makhadiyah educational system is not merely structured around ritual activities or classical learning traditions. Instead, it reflects an integrated educational framework in which spirituality, intellectual development, and social engagement function as interconnected dimensions within the broader process of student character formation.

### 3.2 The Implementation of Islamic Essentialist Values

The findings indicate that Islamic essentialist values constitute the foundational orientation of the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School (PPNC). These values are manifested through the preservation of *turats* (classical Islamic heritage), the cultivation of *adab* (proper conduct), the authority of religious teachers (*kiai* and *ustadz*), spiritual habituation, and the continuity of Islamic scholarly traditions through *sanad* and instructional transmission. Within the educational system, these elements function as permanent values that shape students' religious identity and moral development (Observation, 2025). Field observations revealed that the educational process at PPNC is strongly rooted in the transmission of classical Islamic knowledge through structured kitab studies. Students participate in regular learning activities using traditional texts such as *Safinatun Najah*, *Fathul Qarib*, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Tafsir Jalalain*, and *Ihya' Ulumuddin*. These texts are studied through *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods under the direct supervision of teachers and pesantren caregivers.



**Figure 1.** Classical Islamic Texts (Kitab Kuning) Studied by Students at PPNC

Figure 1 illustrates several classical Islamic texts used within the Makhadiyah educational system. The visual evidence demonstrates that the pesantren maintains a strong orientation toward the preservation of turats as the core foundation of religious learning. The books displayed in the figure represent different branches of Islamic scholarship, including fiqh, ethics, Qur'anic interpretation, and spirituality, indicating that students are introduced to comprehensive Islamic intellectual traditions. The use of these texts also reflects the continuity of scholarly transmission (*sanad*) within pesantren education, where classical knowledge is preserved and passed down directly from teachers to students. Therefore, the figure is not merely illustrative but visually confirms how Islamic essentialist values are institutionalized through the sustained use of authoritative classical references in daily learning activities. Based on observations during kitab sessions, the learning process emphasizes not only intellectual understanding but also educational ethics. Students are expected to demonstrate discipline, attentiveness, and respectful behavior during learning activities. Sitting arrangements, interaction patterns, and communication styles with teachers are regulated according to pesantren norms and traditions (Observation, 2025).



**Figure 2.** The Process of *Kitab Kuning* Learning through *Bandongan* Method

Figure 2 shows the learning atmosphere during a *bandongan* session in which students collectively listen to the teacher's explanation while annotating their texts. The visual arrangement in the figure reflects the hierarchical yet respectful relationship between teacher and students, which constitutes an important element of pesantren educational culture. Students are positioned attentively around the teacher, symbolizing discipline, humility, and respect toward religious authority. The image also demonstrates that the learning process is not limited to knowledge transmission but simultaneously functions as moral training through the cultivation of *adab*. In this context, the physical learning environment, students' posture, and interaction patterns visually reinforce the implementation of Islamic essentialist values within everyday educational practices at PPNC. One educational administrator stated: "Santri dididik bukan hanya memahami ilmu, tetapi juga menjaga adab dan keberkahan ilmu. Karena ilmu tanpa adab akan kehilangan arah." (Nawawi, 2025). Similarly, another senior teacher explained: "Tradisi kitab dan penghormatan kepada guru bukan hanya budaya pesantren, tetapi bagian dari proses pendidikan karakter." (Hizam, 2025). The findings suggest that *adab* occupies a central position within the educational process. Respect toward teachers, obedience to institutional rules, humility in seeking knowledge, and ethical interaction among students are continuously reinforced through daily habituation. These practices are integrated into both formal and informal educational settings and become part of students' lived experiences within

the pesantren environment (Observation, 2025). In addition to kitab studies and moral formation, Islamic essentialist values are also reinforced through spiritual disciplinary activities. Daily and weekly routines include congregational prayers, *tahajud*, collective *wirid*, *ratib*, Qur’anic recitation, and *tazkiyatun nafs* activities. These activities function as mechanisms of spiritual training designed to cultivate inner awareness and personal piety among students (Imad, 2025). Based on field observations, spiritual practices are implemented consistently and collectively within dormitory life. The repetition of worship activities establishes patterns of discipline and religious consciousness that gradually become embedded in students’ personal habits (Observation, 2025). The implementation of Islamic essentialist values within the Makhadiyah system can be summarized as follows:

**Table 3.** Essentialist Values in the Makhadiyah Educational System

Essentialist Value	Educational Practice	Impact on Students
<i>Ta’dib</i>	Adab habituation and teacher guidance	Moral discipline
Preservation of <i>turats</i>	Kitab studies through <i>bandongan</i> and <i>sorogan</i>	Religious literacy
Spiritual discipline	Tahajud, wirid, ratib	Personal piety
Teacher authority	Direct educational supervision	Respect and obedience
Scholarly transmission	Classical learning traditions	Continuity of religious values

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Islamic essentialism within the Makhadiyah educational system extends beyond the preservation of religious traditions. Essentialist values are institutionalized through educational practices, spiritual routines, and social interactions that continuously shape students’ moral and religious character. The educational process therefore functions not only as knowledge transmission but also as a sustained effort to cultivate ethical and spiritually grounded individuals.

### 3.3 The Implementation of Islamic Existentialist Values

The findings reveal that Islamic existentialist values within the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School (PPNC) are implemented through educational activities that provide students with opportunities for self-actualization, decision-making, leadership development, and social engagement. While spiritual and intellectual foundations are continuously strengthened through religious instruction and habituation, students are also encouraged to actively experience and interpret their roles as individuals responsible for society (*Observasi*, 2025). Field data indicate that the implementation of existentialist values is closely associated with educational programs emphasizing experience-based learning and direct social involvement. Several institutional programs including *bahtsul masā’il*, public speaking activities, organizational training, *guru tugas*, *nasyrul ‘ilmi*, and *safari dakwah* serve as educational spaces where students exercise autonomy and develop practical skills.



**Figure 3.** Community Service Activities Conducted by Students

Figure 3 depicts the implementation of the *guru tugas* program in which students are assigned to teach at educational institutions outside the pesantren environment. The image shows a student from PPNC acting as an instructor in a local classroom, guiding and supervising learners in the assigned institution. This activity reflects the practical application of knowledge and pedagogical

responsibility developed through the Makhadiyah educational system. The figure visually demonstrates the existentialist dimension of Islamic education, where students are encouraged to actualize their knowledge through direct engagement with society. Through the *guru tugas* program, students are not only trained to master religious knowledge intellectually but are also entrusted with real educational responsibilities requiring leadership, communication skills, adaptability, and social awareness. The interaction between the student-teacher and learners in the classroom indicates that the educational process extends beyond the pesantren and becomes part of broader community service and social contribution. Among these programs, *bahtsul masā'il* occupies an important role in fostering students' critical reasoning and intellectual participation. Based on classroom observations, students are encouraged to discuss contemporary religious issues collectively using classical Islamic references and argumentation. The forum requires students to formulate opinions, analyze different perspectives, and defend arguments through scholarly reasoning (Observation, 2025).



**Figure 4.** *Bahtsul Masā'il* Discussion Forum

Figure 4 presents the implementation of *bahtsul masā'il* activities in which students engage in collective discussions concerning religious and social issues. The figure demonstrates that students are actively involved in intellectual dialogue rather than functioning merely as passive recipients of knowledge. Through this forum, students are trained to formulate arguments, analyze problems critically, and communicate their perspectives using classical Islamic references. The discussion setting shown in the image visually reinforces the existentialist orientation of the educational process, where students are encouraged to develop intellectual autonomy and personal responsibility in expressing and defending ideas. Thus, the figure confirms that critical reasoning and active participation constitute important components of the Makhadiyah educational system. A Kiyai explained: “Dalam *bahtsul masā'il*, santri tidak hanya mencari jawaban, tetapi belajar bagaimana berpikir, menyampaikan pendapat, dan bertanggung jawab atas argumennya.” (Zubair, 2025). Similarly, public speaking and organizational activities provide students with opportunities to strengthen self-confidence and communication skills. During observations, students regularly participated in speech training sessions, discussion forums, and leadership activities organized within dormitory environments (Observation, 2025). These activities create educational experiences that encourage students to express ideas and engage actively with others.



**Figure 5.** Release Ceremony of the *Guru Tugas* Program

Figure 5 depicts the release ceremony of students participating in the *guru tugas* program before being assigned to various community locations. The image symbolizes the transition of students from internal educational training within the pesantren toward direct engagement with society. The ceremonial setting reflects the institutional seriousness of preparing students to become educators, religious mentors, and social contributors in broader community contexts. Visually, the figure represents the culmination of existential educational formation, where students are entrusted with real responsibilities requiring independence, adaptability, leadership, and ethical commitment. Therefore, the image strengthens the argument that Islamic existentialist values within the Makhadiyah system are implemented through educational experiences emphasizing self-actualization and social responsibility. The strongest manifestation of Islamic existentialist values was identified in community-oriented programs such as *guru tugas*, *nasyrul 'ilmi*, and *safari dakwah*. Through these programs, students are assigned responsibilities outside the pesantren environment and directly engage with communities across Madura and East Java. Institutional records show that in 2024, approximately 135 students were assigned as educational assistants and religious instructors across twenty-one regions, while 54 students participated in *Safari Ramadhan* programs in various districts (PPNC Documentation, *Buku Pedoman Program Pondok Pesantren Nurul Cholil*, 2024). During these assignments, students served as mosque imams, Qur'anic instructors, religious educators, youth mentors, and community preachers. According to one participant involved in the program: "Ketika berada di masyarakat, kami belajar bahwa ilmu bukan hanya dipahami, tetapi juga harus diamalkan dan disesuaikan dengan kondisi lingkungan." (Malik, 2025). Field observations further showed that students encountered various social situations requiring adaptability and responsibility. They interacted with diverse community members, organized educational activities, and participated in social initiatives beyond formal religious instruction (Observation, 2025). The implementation of Islamic existentialist values within educational practices can be summarized below:

**Table 4. Existentialist Values in Educational Practices**

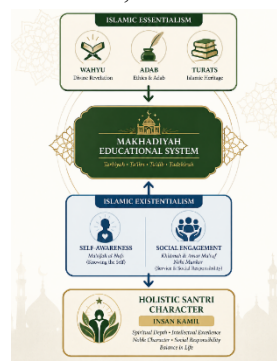
Program	Existential Dimension	Student Development
<i>Bahtsul masā'il</i>	Critical reasoning	Intellectual autonomy
Public speaking	Self-expression	Confidence development
Organizational activities	Leadership responsibility	Managerial skills
<i>Guru tugas</i>	Social responsibility	Community engagement
<i>Safari dakwah</i>	Self-actualization	Social adaptability

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Islamic existentialist values in the Makhadiyah educational system are implemented through experiential and socially oriented educational activities. These programs provide students with opportunities to understand themselves, engage with broader social realities, and exercise responsibility within real-life contexts. Consequently, students are not merely recipients of religious knowledge but active participants in constructing meaningful educational experiences and social contributions.

### 3.4 The Integration of Essentialism and Existentialism in Character Formation

The findings demonstrate that the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School (PPNC) does not position Islamic essentialism and Islamic existentialism as opposing educational orientations. Instead, both dimensions are integrated within a unified educational framework that combines spiritual formation, intellectual development, and social responsibility. This integration creates a holistic educational environment in which students are not only encouraged to master religious knowledge but are also guided to internalize values and actualize them in broader social contexts (Observation, 2025). Field observations indicate that educational activities within the pesantren are systematically designed to connect internal religious formation

with external social engagement. Spiritual practices such as congregational prayer, *tahajud*, *wirid*, and Qur'anic recitation strengthen students' religious consciousness and moral discipline. Simultaneously, intellectual activities including kitab studies, *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and *bahtsul masā'il* develop analytical abilities and religious understanding. These dimensions are further complemented by community-based activities such as *guru tugas*, *nasyrul 'ilmi*, and *safari dakwah*, which provide students with opportunities to engage directly with society (Observation, 2025). According to the pesantren administrators, the Makhadiyah educational system was intentionally designed to maintain balance between spiritual devotion, intellectual competence, and social responsibility: "Pendidikan di pesantren bukan hanya membentuk orang yang paham agama, tetapi membentuk manusia yang dapat menjalankan ilmu dan memberi manfaat kepada masyarakat." Kiai (Zubair, 2025). Similarly, one senior teacher emphasized: "Santri tidak cukup hanya menguasai kitab atau ibadah, tetapi juga harus siap hadir dan berperan di tengah masyarakat." The integration process becomes evident in students' daily educational experiences. Spiritual activities cultivate personal piety and discipline, intellectual activities strengthen religious literacy and reasoning capacity, while social programs encourage responsibility and practical engagement. Rather than functioning separately, these dimensions interact continuously throughout students' educational journeys within the pesantren environment (Observation, 2025). Based on institutional observations and documentation, the educational orientation of the Makhadiyah system reflects an integrated model that neither prioritizes preservation of tradition alone nor promotes unrestricted individual autonomy. Instead, educational practices combine enduring religious values with opportunities for self-development and social participation. Consequently, the educational model cannot be categorized as purely conservative or purely liberal; rather, it demonstrates an integrative educational orientation rooted in Islamic values (PPNC Documentation, *Buku Panduan Sosialisasi PPNC*, 2024).



**Figure 6.** Integration Model of Islamic Essentialism and Existentialism in the Makhadiyah System

The findings further suggest that this integration contributes to the formation of *insan kamil* individuals characterized by spiritual awareness, intellectual maturity, and social responsibility. Students are educated not merely as recipients of knowledge but as individuals prepared to become socially transformative actors capable of contributing positively to society.

## DISCUSSION

### 3.5 The Makhadiyah System as an Integrative Islamic Educational Paradigm

The findings of this study indicate that the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School (PPNC) represents an alternative paradigm of Islamic education that transcends the dichotomy between traditional religious preservation and contemporary social engagement. Rather than positioning Islamic essentialism and existentialism as opposing philosophical orientations, the Makhadiyah system demonstrates that both paradigms can function synergistically within a holistic educational framework. This integration suggests that *pesantren* education is capable of maintaining religious authenticity while simultaneously cultivating students'

reflective awareness, social responsibility, and transformative capacity. This integrative orientation carries important philosophical implications for contemporary Islamic education. The findings reveal that the preservation of religious traditions within pesantren does not necessarily lead to educational conservatism or intellectual rigidity. Instead, enduring Islamic values may function as the ethical and spiritual foundation through which students develop personal agency and social consciousness. In this context, the Makhadiyah system challenges the assumption that modern educational responsiveness can only be achieved through the reduction of traditional religious authority. The study therefore proposes that spiritual discipline, moral formation, and social participation are interconnected dimensions that collectively shape holistic Islamic education. From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, this integrative orientation strongly reflects the concept of ta'dib proposed by (Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, 1995). Al-Attas argues that the primary purpose of Islamic education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but the formation of civilized human beings through the cultivation of adab and the proper recognition of knowledge, ethics, and responsibility. The findings of this study indicate that the Makhadiyah system operationalizes this concept through educational processes emphasizing ethical discipline, moral internalization, and the preservation of Islamic intellectual traditions within everyday educational practices. In this context, educational activities function not only as instructional mechanisms but also as processes of internalizing Islamic worldviews and ethical consciousness (Sunarso, 2020). Consequently, the pesantren educational environment becomes a medium for shaping students' moral identity rather than merely transmitting religious information (Mukhlis, 2023).

The findings also reinforce (Tafsir, 2012) perspective that Islamic education should cultivate human consciousness as khalifah who are responsible for translating divine values into social reality. In the context of the Makhadiyah system, educational processes are oriented not merely toward intellectual mastery of religious knowledge but toward the formation of socially responsible individuals capable of ethical participation within society. This orientation indicates that Islamic education in pesantren can function as a transformative process through which students internalize spiritual values while simultaneously developing social awareness, leadership, and moral responsibility. Consequently, religious learning is positioned not as an isolated intellectual activity but as a foundation for meaningful social engagement and community contribution. An important interpretation emerging from this study is that existential development within pesantren education does not necessarily require detachment from religious authority or traditional structures. In contrast to secular existentialist perspectives that often associate self-actualization with unrestricted individual autonomy (Sartre, Cohen-Solal, & Elkäim-Sartre, 2007), the findings demonstrate that students' reflective awareness and social agency may develop precisely through the internalization of religious discipline, ethical norms, and collective spiritual traditions. This finding offers a new perspective within contemporary Islamic educational discourse by suggesting that the preservation of Islamic tradition and the development of individual consciousness are not contradictory educational goals. Instead, religious authority and spiritual discipline may function as constructive foundations for the emergence of socially transformative individuals within *pesantren* education. Compared with previous pesantren studies, this research offers a different analytical emphasis. Previous studies generally focus on pesantren modernization, institutional management, technological adaptation, or pedagogical transformation (Evaliya Isni Alhidayah & Muh. Hanif, 2024; Muchasan & Rohmawan, 2024). Although such studies contribute significantly to understanding contemporary pesantren development, they rarely examine how philosophical orientations shape educational practices and institutional culture. In contrast, this study demonstrates that educational transformation within pesantren is not determined solely by structural or administrative change but also by the integration of educational values that influence students' moral formation, intellectual development, and social engagement simultaneously. The primary

contribution of this study lies in its formulation of an integrative Islamic educational model that redefines the relationship between religious tradition and contemporary educational transformation within pesantren contexts. The findings demonstrate that the preservation of spiritual discipline and classical Islamic scholarship does not hinder students' intellectual and social development. Instead, these elements may serve as the very foundation for cultivating reflective awareness, ethical responsibility, and transformative social participation. This study therefore contributes a conceptual framework showing that Islamic educational institutions can preserve religious authenticity while simultaneously responding constructively to contemporary societal challenges.

### **3.6 Preservation of Tradition and the Formation of Critical Consciousness**

The findings of this study indicate that the Makhadiyah educational system challenges the common assumption that pesantren education primarily functions as a conservative institution concerned only with preserving religious traditions (Bahri, 2018; Jaohar Tsani & Sauri, 2024). Although PPNC strongly maintains classical Islamic traditions through turats studies, spiritual habituation, and teacher authority, these traditions do not produce intellectual rigidity or passive conformity. Instead, the preservation of tradition functions as an epistemological foundation through which students develop reflective awareness, analytical thinking, and social responsibility. These findings suggest that traditional Islamic education and critical consciousness are not mutually contradictory dimensions within pesantren education. From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, the preservation of tradition within the Makhadiyah system reflects an understanding that religious knowledge is not merely historical inheritance but a living intellectual tradition continuously interpreted within changing social contexts (Intan Permatasari, Triyundana, Herfanda Agif GhifarixPutri Amalia Sholiha, & Khobir, 2026; Mahfudi & Hani, 2025). This orientation corresponds with the perspective of (Rahman, 1982), who argues that Islamic intellectual traditions should function dynamically in responding to contemporary realities rather than remaining static textual legacies. Within the Makhadiyah educational system, classical Islamic texts are not treated solely as objects of memorization but as intellectual references used to analyze social and religious issues contextually. Consequently, students are encouraged not only to preserve religious knowledge but also to understand its relevance within broader societal realities. The findings also resonate with the concept of critical consciousness proposed by (Freire, 1968). Freire emphasizes that education should cultivate reflective awareness enabling individuals to interpret social realities critically and participate actively in social transformation. Although the philosophical background of pesantren differs from secular critical pedagogy, several educational practices within the Makhadiyah system reflect similar principles of reflective engagement. Activities such as bahtsul masā'il, musyawarah forums, public speaking training, and community-based learning encourage students to formulate arguments, analyze differing perspectives, and develop reasoned responses toward contemporary issues (Adi, 2022). These educational practices demonstrate that students are positioned not merely as passive recipients of religious authority but as active participants in the process of meaning-making and intellectual engagement. However, the critical dimension emerging within the pesantren context differs fundamentally from secular models of unrestricted intellectual autonomy. Critical awareness within the Makhadiyah system remains grounded in ethical discipline, spiritual values, and religious responsibility.

The findings indicate that students are encouraged to think critically without detaching themselves from moral and spiritual commitments. In this context, intellectual development is directed not toward rejecting religious authority or tradition but toward understanding and contextualizing Islamic values responsibly within social life. This finding demonstrates that critical consciousness in pesantren education may develop through the internalization of religious ethics rather than through opposition to tradition itself. This interpretation is also consistent with the

concept of intellectual religiosity proposed by (Zarkasyi, 2016), which emphasizes the integration of rational development and spiritual consciousness within Islamic education. According to this perspective, intellectuality and religiosity should not be separated because both constitute interconnected dimensions of human development. The Makhadiyah system reflects this integrative orientation by cultivating analytical reasoning while simultaneously strengthening students' ethical awareness and spiritual discipline. As a result, students are prepared not only to understand religious knowledge intellectually but also to apply it responsibly within social realities. Compared with previous studies, this finding offers a different interpretation regarding pesantren education. Earlier studies frequently portray pesantren primarily as institutions characterized by conservatism and strong traditional authority structures (Bahri, 2018; Murdianto, 2023). Such perspectives often produce a dichotomous distinction between traditional pesantren and modern critical education. In contrast, this study demonstrates that traditional pesantren environments may simultaneously preserve religious traditions and cultivate reflective social awareness. The findings suggest that educational innovation within pesantren does not necessarily require secularization or the abandonment of tradition. Instead, critical consciousness may emerge internally through the reinterpretation and educational activation of traditional Islamic values themselves. The primary contribution of this study lies in its argument that the preservation of Islamic tradition and the development of critical consciousness can function synergistically within pesantren education. The Makhadiyah system demonstrates that traditional Islamic educational practices are not inherently opposed to reflective thinking or social awareness. Rather, spiritual discipline, religious authority, and classical scholarship may become the very foundations upon which students develop intellectual maturity and transformative social consciousness. This finding broadens contemporary discussions on pesantren transformation by showing that critical and socially engaged educational models may emerge organically from within traditional Islamic epistemological structures.

### **3.7 Social Transformation Through Pesantren Education**

The findings of this study indicate that the educational orientation of the Makhadiyah system extends beyond the conventional understanding of education as a process limited to classroom instruction and knowledge transmission (Saparina & M, 2024). Within the Makhadiyah educational framework, learning is closely connected with social engagement and community responsibility. Educational programs such as guru tugas, nasyrul 'ilmi, and safari dakwah demonstrate that pesantren education is designed not only to strengthen students' religious competence but also to prepare them for active participation within broader social life (Abdullah & Muawaroh, 2021). These findings suggest that educational success in pesantren is measured not merely through intellectual mastery but also through students' ability to contribute meaningfully to society. From the perspective of Islamic education, this orientation reflects the understanding that knowledge should be translated into ethical action and social responsibility. This interpretation corresponds with the perspective of (Mudlofir, 2013), who argues that Islamic education should function as a process of character formation and social transformation rather than merely academic instruction. Within the Makhadiyah system, religious learning is continuously connected with practical experiences that require students to apply Islamic values within real social situations. Consequently, education becomes a transformative process through which students internalize religious teachings while simultaneously developing awareness of their responsibilities toward society (Dalimunthe, 2023). The findings also resonate with transformative educational perspectives proposed by (Freire, 1968), which emphasize that education should enable learners to become active participants in shaping social realities. Although the Makhadiyah system emerges from an Islamic educational tradition, several educational practices reflect transformative principles through experiential learning and community engagement. Programs such as guru tugas and safari dakwah place students directly within community

environments where they encounter social diversity, organizational responsibilities, and practical challenges requiring adaptability and ethical decision-making. These experiences encourage students to move beyond passive learning toward active social participation and reflective engagement with society. However, transformative education within the pesantren context differs from secular transformative models that often prioritize social change detached from spiritual foundations (Mudzhar, 2017). The findings of this study demonstrate that social transformation within the Makhadiyah system remains rooted in Islamic ethical values and spiritual discipline. Community engagement is not interpreted solely as social activism but as a manifestation of religious responsibility and moral commitment. In this context, social participation becomes part of students' spiritual development as khalifah entrusted with responsibilities toward both God and society. This interpretation aligns with the Islamic educational perspective emphasizing that human beings are responsible for contributing positively to social welfare and moral order (Alim, 2020; Quraish, 2023).

The findings further indicate that community-based educational activities within the Makhadiyah system function as mechanisms for integrating spirituality, intellectuality, and social responsibility simultaneously. Students are not educated solely to master religious texts but are prepared to become individuals capable of translating religious understanding into constructive social action. This orientation reflects what (Mikraj & Rofik, 2024) describe as transformative Islamic education, namely educational processes aimed at developing morally conscious individuals capable of responding to contemporary societal challenges. The Makhadiyah system therefore positions social engagement not as a supplementary activity but as a core dimension of educational formation. Compared with previous studies, this finding offers a broader interpretation regarding the social role of pesantren education. Earlier studies generally emphasize pesantren as institutions primarily concerned with preserving religious traditions and internal moral discipline (Bahri, 2018; Mastuhu, 1994). Although community service is often acknowledged within pesantren activities, it is frequently treated as an additional institutional function rather than a central educational philosophy. In contrast, this study demonstrates that social engagement within the Makhadiyah system constitutes an integral educational mechanism through which students develop ethical awareness, leadership capacity, and transformative social consciousness. The primary contribution of this study lies in its identification of pesantren education as a transformative educational model integrating religious values with experiential social learning. The findings suggest that pesantren institutions do not merely reproduce religious traditions but may also function as spaces for cultivating socially engaged and morally responsible individuals. The Makhadiyah system demonstrates that spiritual formation and social transformation are not separate educational goals but interconnected dimensions within holistic Islamic education. This finding broadens contemporary discussions on pesantren transformation by showing that Islamic educational institutions may preserve religious authenticity while simultaneously fostering students' active participation in addressing contemporary social realities.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Makhadiyah educational system at Nurul Cholil Islamic Boarding School (PPNC) represents an integrative model of Islamic education that combines Islamic essentialist and existentialist values within a holistic educational framework. The integration is reflected through three interconnected dimensions: spiritual formation, intellectual development, and social responsibility. Islamic essentialist values are institutionalized through the preservation of turats, the cultivation of adab, and spiritual discipline, while Islamic existentialist values are implemented through experiential and community-based programs that encourage critical awareness, leadership, and social engagement among students. The study contributes theoretically by offering

an integrative perspective that bridges Islamic essentialism and existentialism within pesantren educational practices. Practically, the findings provide an alternative framework for Islamic educational institutions seeking to preserve religious values while simultaneously developing students' social awareness and transformative capacities in contemporary society. This study is limited to a single pesantren context and focuses primarily on qualitative exploration within the Makhadiyah educational system at PPNC. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all pesantren institutions with different educational cultures and organizational structures. Future studies are recommended to examine similar integrative educational models in various pesantren contexts and to explore their long-term impact on students' character formation, social participation, and educational transformation.

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