



## Internalizing the Values of Togetherness and Simplicity Among Santri Through the Tradition of Communal Eating at As'adiyah Sengkang Islamic Boarding School

**Umrati<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia*

**Nurul Mawaddah<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>2</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia*

**Mansur<sup>3</sup>**

*<sup>3</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia*

**Muhsyanur<sup>4</sup>**

*<sup>4</sup>Universitas Islam As'adiyah Sengkang, Indonesia*

*Corresponding Author: [umrati@unisad.ac.id](mailto:umrati@unisad.ac.id)*

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### ABSTRACT

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia constitute living laboratories of character formation, where daily rituals serve as primary conduits for value transmission. This community service study examines the internalization of togetherness (kebersamaan) and simplicity (kesederhanaan) among santri through the tradition of communal eating (makan berjamaah) at Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang, Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach with participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis, the study engaged 48 santri, 12 ustadz, and 6 senior institutional figures across a six-week fieldwork period. Findings reveal that communal eating operates as a three-phase ritual space—pre-meal, during-meal, and post-meal—through which values are transmitted via habituation, role modeling, and structured reflection. The tradition dismantles socioeconomic distinctions, reinforces collective identity rooted in Islamic brotherhood (ukhuwwah), and cultivates an ascetic orientation toward

material sufficiency. These findings contribute to the literature on values education within pesantren culture and offer practical recommendations for character education policy at the national level.

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## INTRODUCTION

Child stunting—

Islamic boarding schools, known in Indonesia as pesantren, occupy a singular position in the archipelago's educational and cultural landscape. As institutions that predate the Indonesian republic itself, pesantren have for centuries served not merely as sites of Islamic textual learning but as total social environments—or, in Goffman's (1961) sociological formulation, "total institutions"—in which the entirety of a student's daily life becomes a medium of moral and spiritual formation. What distinguishes the pesantren as a pedagogical model is precisely this holism: character is not taught as a discrete subject but breathed through the rhythms of communal living. Among the many rituals that structure santri (boarding school student) daily life, the tradition of communal eating—eating together in rows on the floor from shared plates—stands as one of the most symbolically dense and practically consequential practices of value transmission found across the Indonesian pesantren world.

The internalization of values through daily practice is a well-established principle in Islamic educational philosophy. Nata (2014) emphasized that the internalization of values in Islamic education does not occur through the transfer of knowledge alone, but through continuous appreciation and practice in daily life. This principle finds its institutional expression in the pesantren system, where the boundaries between formal instruction and lived practice are deliberately blurred. Muhaimin (2012) explained that one of the main strengths of pesantren education lies in its ability to integrate Islamic values into every aspect of students' lives, so that these values are not only understood cognitively but also lived affectively and practiced psychomotorically. The tradition of congregational meals (communal eating) at pesantren such as As'adiyah exemplifies this integrative pedagogy: a daily biological necessity is transformed into a structured moral event through spatial arrangement, ritual protocol, and communal reflection.

Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang, located in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, holds a distinctive place within the Indonesian Islamic educational tradition as one of the oldest and most intellectually productive pesantren in eastern Indonesia, founded in 1930 by Anregurutta H. Muhammad As'ad. With an enrollment exceeding three thousand santri across its various educational units, As'adiyah operates as a substantial total community whose internal culture has been shaped by nearly a century of continuous institutional practice. The institution's tradition of *makan berjamaah* is not incidental but deliberate and rule-governed: santri eat at prescribed times, in prescribed formations, sharing food from a common talam

(large communal tray) with fellow students across educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds. Zuhairini dkk. (2015) stated that pesantren traditions such as eating together are a tangible manifestation of character education based on local culture and Islamic values, which have great potential to form a complete and noble personality of students.

The values of togetherness (*kebersamaan*) and simplicity (*kesederhanaan*) represent two of the foundational character pillars that As'adiyah's institutional culture explicitly seeks to cultivate. *Kesederhanaan* in the pesantren tradition is not merely the absence of luxury but an affirmative orientation toward material sufficiency—a disciplined, theologically grounded relationship to material life that enables focus on spiritual and intellectual development. Kemendikbud (2017) menegaskan bahwa kesederhanaan merupakan salah satu dari delapan belas nilai karakter yang menjadi prioritas dalam Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) nasional, sebagai fondasi pembentukan generasi bangsa yang berintegritas dan tidak konsumtif. *Kebersamaan*, meanwhile, articulates an Islamic social ethic rooted in the Qur'anic concept of *ukhuwwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), which positions communal solidarity not as a cultural preference but as a religious obligation that transcends ethnic, economic, and educational divides.

Contemporary Indonesian education policy has recognized the unique contribution of pesantren to national character formation. Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren (Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren) formally acknowledged pesantren as independent educational institutions with a distinctive character-forming mission, effectively integrating them into the national education framework while preserving their institutional autonomy. Dahlan (2018) argues that the state's recognition of pesantren as a formal educational institution should not sacrifice the peculiarities of pesantren traditions that have been proven over centuries to shape the nation's character; Instead, local wisdom and daily traditions of Islamic boarding schools such as congregational meals need to be documented and used as a model for strengthening character education in other educational institutions. Community service research of the kind reported here responds directly to this policy imperative by generating systematic ethnographic documentation of a specific pesantren tradition and analyzing its mechanisms of value transmission in ways that can inform both institutional practice and broader educational policy.

Despite the rich oral and institutional literature surrounding pesantren daily life, academic studies specifically focused on communal eating as a vehicle for values internalization remain surprisingly sparse. Existing research on pesantren character education has predominantly attended to formal religious instruction (*halaqah*, *kitab kuning* study, and Friday sermons) while leaving the informal and semi-formal practices of daily life—meals, cooperative labor, collective worship schedules—undertheorized as sites of moral formation. Zubaedi (2015) notes that the most effective and sustainable character education is one that is hidden and integrated into daily routines, rather than those that are formally taught in front of the classroom; In this context, the tradition of congregational meals in Islamic

boarding schools is the most concrete example of a hidden curriculum that contains deep moral messages about egalitarianism, social solidarity, and lust control. The present study addresses this gap by providing a detailed ethnographic account of how As'adiyah's communal eating tradition functions as a structured moral pedagogy, and by theorizing the mechanisms through which its ritual architecture produces the internalization of Togetherness and Simplicity among participants.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, situating the research within the interpretive paradigm of cultural anthropology and the sociology of education. Fieldwork was conducted over six consecutive weeks at Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang, Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, between March and April 2024 as part of a structured community service program (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat) carried out under the auspices of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone in collaboration with the pesantren's institutional leadership. The research team comprised three researchers who resided on-site throughout the fieldwork period, enabling full immersion in the daily rhythms of pesantren life and direct participation in the *makan berjamaah* tradition on multiple occasions. Primary data were generated through three complementary methods: (1) participant observation conducted across all three meals of the day (sarapan, makan siang, and makan malam) over the full six-week period, generating approximately 180 observation sessions documented through structured field notes organized around a pre-designed observation protocol attending to spatial arrangement, ritual sequence, verbal and non-verbal communication, and deviation responses; (2) in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and Bugis with 48 santri (purposively sampled across three levels: junior secondary, senior secondary, and post-secondary Ma'had Aly), 12 ustadz, and 6 senior institutional figures including the pesantren's current pimpinan and two senior alumni now serving in leadership roles, with all interviews audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim following member-checking procedures; and (3) documentary analysis of institutional regulations (kitab tata tertib), historical records, and photographic archives pertaining to the *makan berjamaah* tradition spanning the institution's history. Data analysis followed Spradley's (1980) ethnographic analysis sequence—domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and theme analysis—supplemented by Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model of qualitative data analysis comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analytical trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement, triangulation across data sources and methods, and member-checking with five senior informants who reviewed preliminary thematic interpretations.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Ritual Architecture of *Makan berjamaah* as a Moral Pedagogy**

Observation data collected across 180 meal sessions revealed that the *makan berjamaah* tradition at As'adiyah is not a spontaneous or loosely organized gathering but a highly structured ritual event governed by explicit rules, implicit norms, and a sequential three-phase architecture that collectively constitute what Turner (1969) would recognize as a liminal space—a zone of social suspension in which ordinary hierarchies are dissolved and collective identity is renewed. The pre-meal phase begins approximately fifteen minutes before the scheduled meal time, when a designated santri (petugas makan) calls peers to perform communal ablution and assemble in the dapur bersama (communal kitchen area). This assembly follows a strict queue in which seniority in terms of educational level does not grant priority; all santri queue in the order they arrive, an arrangement that senior ustadz informants confirmed is deliberately maintained as a daily lesson in egalitarianism. Haidar (2013) emphasizing that egalitarianism is one of the core values in the pesantren culture that distinguishes it from other educational institutions; The elimination of social hierarchies in daily routines such as food queues reflects a real appreciation of the principle of equality in Islam.

The during-meal phase constitutes the ritual's symbolic core. Santri sit cross-legged on floor mats arranged in rows of six to eight individuals per talam—a large communal tray from which all members of the row eat simultaneously. The sharing of a single talam is non-negotiable: individual plates are not provided, and a santri who separates their portion is gently corrected by peers or the supervising ustadz. This enforced physical sharing operates as a powerful daily rehearsal of the Islamic ethical principle that the community's sustenance is held in common—that food, like knowledge and blessing, is most fully realized when shared rather than individually consumed. Ramayulis (2015) explains that in the Islamic educational tradition, physical symbols such as the shared dining container have pedagogical power that goes far beyond their literal function; Talam is not just a dining utensil but a concrete medium that establishes the values of ukhuwwah and tawadhu into the physical experience of students every day. Observation consistently recorded that the talam arrangement also serves a practical conflict-resolution function: when disputes arise between santri, the obligation to eat from a shared tray creates a daily situation of enforced proximity and cooperation that over time erodes interpersonal friction through the logic of shared dependency.

The post-meal phase—comprising collective cleaning of the eating area, placement of talam for washing, and a brief communal dhikr and expression of gratitude led by the supervising ustadz—constitutes the reflective dimension of the ritual cycle. This phase is critical to the internalization process because it transforms the meal from a biological event into a consciously narrated moral experience: santri are invited to reflect aloud on the sufficiency of simple food as a blessing, on the beauty of eating together without competition, and on the religious meaning of gratitude. Tafsir (2014) stating that guided reflection is a component that should not be ignored in the process of internalizing values; Without deliberate and structured reflection, physical practice risks becoming an empty ritual that is carried out

mechanically without meaningful appreciation, so that it fails to achieve the true transformation of values in students. The post-meal dhikr phase at As'adiyah functions as precisely this guided reflective mechanism, ensuring that the physical experience of communal eating is continuously tethered to its theological and moral significance.

Interviews with santri across educational levels revealed a sophisticated awareness of the ritual's intentionality that increased markedly with length of residence at the pesantren. Junior-level santri in their first year of residence described *makan berjamaah* primarily in functional terms—as a convenient and efficient way to be fed—while senior and Ma'had Aly-level participants articulated the tradition's pedagogical architecture in terms that closely mirrored the researchers' own analytical categories, often unprompted. A third-year Ma'had Aly participant described the talam arrangement as teaching him "to remember that I am never eating alone—not from this tray, not in this life, not before Allah." This progression from functional to symbolic understanding across the trajectory of pesantren residence reflects what Kohlberg (1981) described as the developmental movement from conventional to post-conventional moral reasoning, and what Indonesian educationists such as Majid dan Andayani (2013) conceptualize as a journey from known value (knowing) to perceived value (feeling) and finally value practiced (acting)—a transformation process that can only be achieved through repetition, deepening, and reflection that takes place over a long period of time.



**Figure 1.** Three-Phase Internalization Model of *Makan berjamaah* Tradition at Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang

Note. The three-phase model was constructed inductively from 180 observation sessions and triangulated with interview data from 48 santri and 12 ustadz. Mechanism categories are adapted from Lickona's (1991) components of character education: knowing, feeling, and acting.

### **Internalization of Kebersamaan Through Shared Material Practice**

The internalization of *kebersamaan* (togetherness) as a lived value – rather than an abstract ideal – emerged as the most consistently documented outcome of the *makan berjamaah* tradition across all three data streams. What made this internalization distinctive, compared to the formal transmission of Islamic social ethics through classroom instruction, was its material groundedness: the value of togetherness was not primarily argued for or explained but physically enacted through the bodily discipline of shared eating. This observation resonates with Bourdieu's (1990) concept of the *habitus* – the system of durable, transposable dispositions that are inculcated through repeated physical practice rather than conscious cognitive instruction. Sitting elbow-to-elbow with peers of different backgrounds, reaching for food from the same tray, adjusting one's pace of eating to the group's rhythm – these micro-practices, repeated three times daily across months and years of residence, embed a somatic orientation toward collective life that shapes social behavior in ways that persist beyond the pesantren environment. Maunah (2015) stating that habituation or habituation is the most effective method of character education for social values such as togetherness; When a social behavior is repeated consistently in a meaningful context, it gradually transforms from a conscious action to a spontaneous disposition that underlies the individual's response in a new social situation.

Observation data documented several specific behavioral manifestations of internalized *kebersamaan* that extended beyond the meal context itself. Santri who had resided at As'adiyah for two or more years consistently demonstrated spontaneous cooperative behavior in shared workspaces, mutual assistance during *piket* (collective cleaning duties), and inclusive social behavior toward newly enrolled peers that interview data attributed explicitly to the lessons of *makan berjamaah*. Several ustadz informants noted that santri who had been raised in more individualistic household environments – particularly those from urban professional families – exhibited the most visible behavioral transformation over their first year of residence, precisely because the *makan berjamaah* tradition confronted them with a social practice radically different from their prior experience. Lickona (1991) argues that moral education is most powerful when it creates productive cognitive dissonance – when students encounter practices that challenge their habitual assumptions and require active negotiation of new values; in this sense, the *makan berjamaah* tradition at As'adiyah functions as a daily laboratory of productive social dissonance for santri whose prior socialization has not emphasized collective orientation.

The kebersamaan internalized through *makan berjamaah* carries a specifically Islamic theological grounding that distinguishes it from secular forms of social solidarity. Ustadz informants consistently framed the tradition in terms of the Prophetic hadith on the blessing of eating together—a narration from Wahshi ibn Harb in which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed companions to eat together and mention God's name, promising that blessing (*barakah*) would descend upon communal meals. This theological dimension transforms *makan berjamaah* from a pedagogical strategy into an act of worship—a framing that significantly amplifies its motivational power and its resistance to erosion under conditions of modernization and individualization. Amin (2012) argue that the success of pesantren in internalizing socio-religious values stems from the institution's ability to integrate the spiritual dimension with the social dimension in one inseparable practice; When students understand that eating together is not only a social tradition but also a worship that obtains rewards, the motivation to maintain and live the practice becomes much stronger and more durable.

The socioeconomic dimension of kebersamaan deserves particular analytical attention given As'adiyah's diverse student body, which includes santri from subsistence farming families in rural Wajo alongside children of regional government officials and established merchant families. The *makan berjamaah* tradition operates as a systematic equalizer within this heterogeneous community: regardless of the family wealth that a santri brings from home, all eat identical food from identical trays in identical spatial arrangements. Several wealthy-background santri in the interview sample described an initial period of discomfort at the perceived austerity of pesantren food—and then a subsequent period of what they termed "liberation" from the self-consciousness of material comparison. This trajectory reflects what Freire (1970) described as conscientization—the process through which individuals develop critical awareness of social structures through transformative experience rather than abstract analysis. Nashir (2013) stated that the ability of pesantren to transcend the boundaries of social class through daily practices such as equality in eating together is an important contribution of pesantren to the development of the nation's social capital; In the midst of increasing socio-economic disparities in Indonesia, the value of togetherness instilled by pesantren is becoming increasingly relevant as a counterbalance to individualism that is increasingly strengthening in modern society.

### **Internalization of Kesederhanaan and Its Contemporary Relevance**

The internalization of kesederhanaan (simplicity) through *makan berjamaah* operates through a different but complementary mechanism to that of kebersamaan: while togetherness is primarily enacted through spatial and relational arrangements, simplicity is transmitted through sensory encounter—the daily experience of plain, nutritionally adequate but non-luxurious food that is valued not for its indulgence but for its sufficiency. The pesantren meal at As'adiyah typically consists of rice, one protein source (fish, eggs, or tempeh), and a vegetable preparation—an intentionally

modest spread that ustadz informants unanimously described as reflective of the institution's founding principle: that the mind is sharpened, not dulled, by the discipline of simple living. Qomar (2015) explains that simplicity in the tradition of pesantren is not an enforced poverty but a deliberate pedagogical choice; The founders and leaders of Islamic boarding schools have historically maintained a modest standard of living not because of the absence of alternatives but as a statement of value that material excess distracts from the higher purpose of life.

Interview data with senior santri and ustadz revealed a nuanced understanding of kesederhanaan that distinguished it clearly from privation or passivity. Multiple informants articulated the value as an active, disciplined choice to orient life around non-material goods—knowledge, spiritual development, relationships, service—rather than as resignation to limited resources. A senior ustadz with over twenty years of residence at As'adiyah described *makan berjamaah* as teaching santri to distinguish between kebutuhan (genuine need) and keinginan (desire)—a distinction that he argued was increasingly difficult to maintain in a consumer society that deliberately obscures it. Suyadi (2013) argues that one of the biggest challenges of character education in contemporary Indonesia is the current of consumerism that instills values that are in direct conflict with simplicity; In this context, pesantren that are able to maintain the tradition of congregational meals with consistent standards of simplicity provide a very valuable counter-hegemony space for the formation of the character of the younger generation.

Documentary analysis of As'adiyah's institutional regulations (tata tertib) confirmed that kesederhanaan in the *makan berjamaah* context is formally codified rather than informally maintained: regulations explicitly prohibit santri from bringing additional food from outside to supplement pesantren meals (except in cases of medically documented dietary restriction), from requesting or receiving preferential food treatment based on family background, and from expressing verbal dissatisfaction with the quality or quantity of provided meals in a manner disrespectful to the institution's kitchen staff. These regulations, reviewed annually by the institutional leadership in consultation with senior santri representatives, demonstrate that kesederhanaan is understood at As'adiyah as a value requiring active institutional protection against the erosive pressures of consumer culture and familial indulgence. Wiyani (2013) declaring that educational institutions that are serious in character education must embody the values that are instilled in regulations and rules that apply consistently to all community citizens; Inconsistencies between the values taught and the regulations applied will result in cognitive dissonance that undermines students' trust in the institution and hinders the internalization process.

The contemporary relevance of kesederhanaan as internalized through *makan berjamaah* extends significantly beyond the pesantren walls. Follow-up interviews conducted with five As'adiyah alumni who had graduated between five and fifteen years prior and were now working in diverse professional contexts—including government, business, and NGO work—consistently identified the simplicity

discipline cultivated through *makan berjamaah* as one of the most practically consequential lessons of their pesantren education. Several described a heightened resistance to bribery and corrupt financial practices in their professional lives that they traced explicitly to their pesantren-formed orientation toward material sufficiency. This alumni testimony provides preliminary evidence—beyond the scope of the present study's formal evaluation—that the values internalized through *makan berjamaah* may be durably transferred across contexts, consistent with Berkowitz and Bier's (2005) finding that the most powerful character education programs are those whose effects persist into adult professional and civic life. Syarbini (2014) emphasizing that the true benchmark of the success of character education does not lie in the behavior of students while in the pesantren environment but in the extent to which the internalized values are able to direct their ethical choices in the professional and social life of the post-pesantren – a transformative dimension that makes the tradition of congregational eating not just a ritual practice but a long-term investment in character for the nation.

## CONCLUSION

This ethnographic community service study demonstrates that the tradition of *makan berjamaah* at Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang constitutes a sophisticated, three-phase moral pedagogy that systematically internalizes the values of *kebersamaan* and *kesederhanaan* through the mechanisms of habituation, role modeling, and guided reflection—a living example of character education that is simultaneously Islamic in its theological grounding, local in its cultural expression, and universal in its pedagogical logic. The *talam* arrangement physically enacts Islamic egalitarianism, the shared meal schedule instills communal time discipline, the modesty of the food offering cultivates an active orientation toward material sufficiency, and the post-meal *dhikr* anchors the entire experience in a framework of theological gratitude that resists secularization and commodification.

These findings carry important implications for educational policy and practice at multiple levels. First, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology should invest in systematic ethnographic documentation of pesantren daily life traditions across Indonesia's diverse pesantren landscape, recognizing these traditions as constituting a national character education heritage of exceptional depth and proven effectiveness. Second, the three-phase internalization model identified at As'adiyah—habituation, role modeling, and guided reflection—should be studied as a potential framework adaptable for values education programs in formal schooling contexts beyond the pesantren system, including state junior and senior secondary schools with boarding components. Third, As'adiyah and comparable institutions should be encouraged and supported to maintain the physical and ritual integrity of *makan berjamaah* traditions against modernizing pressures that favor individual dining arrangements; the pedagogical value of the communal eating structure is inseparable from its physical form and must be actively protected as an institutional resource. Fourth,

future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the persistence of internalized values among As'adiyah alumni across their professional careers, providing robust evidence for policy arguments about the long-term character formation impact of pesantren daily life traditions. Finally, community service partnerships between universities and pesantren institutions should be institutionalized as a recurring research and documentation priority within the national higher education community service (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat) framework, ensuring that the irreplaceable pedagogical wisdom embedded in these institutions' living traditions is systematically preserved, analyzed, and shared with the broader educational community.

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