

Internalising Self-Reliance through *Musyrifah–Santriwati* Interaction: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pola interaksi antara musyrifah dan santriwati dalam menginternalisasi karakter kemandirian menggunakan kerangka *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT). Penelitian ini menggunakan desain etnografi kualitatif di sebuah asrama sekolah di Yogyakarta dengan melibatkan tiga santriwati dan empat musyrifah melalui *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *Developmental Research Sequence* (DRS) Spradley. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemandirian berkembang bukan melalui pendekatan otoriter, melainkan melalui pemenuhan kebutuhan psikologis dasar. Dukungan otonomi mendorong munculnya inisiatif santriwati dalam mengelola aktivitas, kompetensi diperkuat melalui rutinitas harian yang terstruktur, sedangkan keterhubungan dibangun melalui hubungan hangat antara musyrifah dan santriwati. Pemenuhan ketiga kebutuhan tersebut mampu mengubah motivasi santriwati dari kepatuhan eksternal menjadi regulasi diri yang berkelanjutan. Temuan ini memperluas penerapan SDT dalam menjelaskan proses internalisasi karakter kemandirian pada pendidikan berasrama.

Kata kunci: pendidikan karakter, kemandirian, dukungan otonomi, asrama sekolah

Abstract

This study analysed the interaction patterns between dormitory supervisors (musyrifah) and female students (santriwati) in internalising self-reliance using the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework. Employing a qualitative ethnographic design, the research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school in Yogyakarta. Data were collected from four supervisors and three students through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, then analysed using Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence. The findings indicate that self-reliance develops through psychological support rather than authoritarian control. Autonomy was fostered through student-led initiatives, including the "sticky notes strategy" for managing daily responsibilities. Competence emerged from a structured daily routine functioning as a "silent educator," while relatedness was strengthened through the musyrifah's role as a "proxy parent" who used private communication to reduce ego threats during disciplinary guidance. Fulfilment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness shifted students' motivation from external compliance to identified regulation, establishing self-reliance as a genuine and sustainable character trait within the Islamic boarding school context.

Keywords: character education, self-reliance, autonomy support, dormitory supervision



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INTRODUCTION

A systemic vulnerability frequently observed within highly structured residential educational institutions, particularly in Islamic boarding schools, is the superficiality of character internalisation. The emergence of the research problem stems from preliminary field observations and recent empirical literature indicating that students in Indonesian boarding schools often exhibit behavioural compliance driven purely by institutional surveillance, rigid regulatory frameworks, and the pervasive fear of punitive sanctions or seniority pressure. Recent systematic reviews and quantitative studies emphasise that compliance in these settings frequently emerges merely as a superficial response to external structural control rather than internalised self-regulation, demonstrating that external control mechanisms alone are insufficient to foster sustainable discipline (Asmawan, Thoyibbah, & Gano-an, 2023). This phenomenon represents a critical gap between traditional disciplinary methodologies and the psychological requirements for genuine character assimilation (Fauzi, Suryadi, Fatkhullah, & Saefurridjal, 2023). When compliance is strictly externally motivated, it fails to translate into enduring moral, academic, or practical autonomy once the student transitions out of the highly regulated dormitory environment and back into broader society or unstructured domestic settings.

Character education has become the primary focus of Islamic education at Islamic Senior High Schools (*Madrasah Aliyah*) as an effort to form a generation of young people with strong moral qualities, including honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and hard work (Sayuti, Iswantir, Salmiwati, Khamim, & Zulfiyani, 2024). Unlike traditional educational models where pedagogical interventions are strictly confined to formal classroom hours, the boarding school environment operates on a continuous, unabated twenty-four-hour cycle (Guerrero, Valenciano-Valcárcel, & Rodríguez, 2024). This unbroken temporal continuity presents an immersive ecosystem where cognitive instruction, religious internalisation, and behavioural habituation intersect continuously (Asshidiqi, Muharam, Fajrussalam, Mustikaati, & Ruswan, 2023). While other pedagogical frameworks like social learning theory or self-efficacy highlight the importance of behavioural role modelling and individual confidence in skill acquisition, they often overlook the profound underlying emotional needs required to transform external compliance into an authentic, internalised identity (Fauzi et al., 2023). Similarly, traditional character education frameworks frequently prioritise the normative transmission of moral virtues without adequately addressing the psychological and motivational continuum that dictates whether a student truly values these virtues or merely obeys out of institutional pressure.

To address this gap, self-determination theory (SDT) emerges as a robust alternative solution. SDT diverges radically from traditional behaviourist models by emphasising the quality and source of motivation. SDT is uniquely suited for this study because it explicitly deconstructs this internalisation process, identifying how the fulfilment of inherent psychological needs—namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness—converts external directives into self-endorsed behaviour (Wang, Wang, Wang, Wind, & Gill, 2024). While historical research into Islamic boarding schools has largely focused on the managerial, theological, or structural elements of character education (Arwiyah, Machfiroh, Djoko, & Suyanto, 2018), this study chose the specific solution of analysing the microscopic, interpersonal interactions between students and their dormitory supervisors through the SDT lens. The rationale is that these supervisors operate not merely as disciplinarians but as proxy parents embedded within a highly complex relational matrix, serving as the primary conduit through which values are modelled and assimilated. Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: How do the interaction patterns between *musyrifah* and *santriwati* fulfil the three basic psychological needs of SDT in internalising self-reliance? Consequently, the primary aim of this research was to investigate these interaction patterns and evaluate how they contributed to the authentic internalisation of self-reliance within the boarding school ecosystem.

Literature Review

The Internalisation Continuum in Character Education

A critical and highly applicable contribution of SDT to character education is its nuanced taxonomy of extrinsic motivation, conceptualised not as a binary state but as a continuous spectrum of internalisation (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). When educational institutions attempt to instil a specific character trait such as self-reliance, the resulting student behaviour can fall anywhere along this continuum based entirely on how effectively the surrounding environment supports the student's basic psychological needs (Sasmita & Wantini, 2023). Recent meta-analyses confirm that these regulatory styles array in a simplex pattern, where adjacent regulatory styles are more highly correlated than those further apart on the continuum (Howard, Slem, & Wang, 2025). To understand how the *santriwati* transition from external compliance to genuine self-reliance, this study utilises the internalisation continuum of extrinsic motivation within the self-determination theory framework, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Internalisation Continuum of Extrinsic Motivation (Adapted from Ryan & Deci, 2022)

No	Regulatory Style	Locus of Causality	Description within the Boarding School Context	Behavioural Outcome
1	Amotivation	Impersonal	A state lacking any intention to act. The student perceives no contingency between actions and outcomes.	Apathy, extreme passivity, and high risk of institutional dropout.
2	External Regulation	Highly External	Actions are performed solely to satisfy an external demand, obtain a reward, or avoid punitive sanctions.	Superficial compliance; the desired behaviour ceases immediately when supervision is removed.
3	Introjected Regulation	Somewhat External	Actions are driven by internal pressures such as guilt, anxiety, or the desire for ego enhancement and peer approval.	Fragile adherence; creates significant psychological stress, conditional self-worth, and anxiety.
4	Identified Regulation	Somewhat Internal	Actions are consciously valued and accepted as personally important. The student understands the utility of the institutional rule.	Sustained self-reliance; the student takes active initiative because the behaviour aligns with personal goals.
5	Integrated Regulation	Highly Internal	The behaviour is fully assimilated into the individual's core identity, deeply congruent with other personal values and beliefs.	Authentic character formation; self-reliance becomes a defining, permanent personal trait.
6	Intrinsic Motivation	Completely Internal	Engaging in an activity purely for the inherent satisfaction, joy, or intellectual interest it provides.	Spontaneous, autonomous exploration and high-level mastery without need for external prompts.

In the context of residential education, the transition from introjected regulation—where students obey the rules simply to avoid feelings of guilt, evade public shaming, or maintain face among peers—to identified regulation is the most critical juncture in the entire process of character development (Guay, 2022). Identified regulation occurs when a student explicitly recognises the intrinsic value of self-reliance, such as managing their own academic schedule to improve their future professional or spiritual prospects, rather than doing so merely because a supervisor commanded it (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Studies exploring learning environments emphasise that identified regulation is a powerful predictor of academic persistence, psychological well-being, and sustained moral behaviour (Howard et al., 2025; Septianingti & Herwin, 2022).

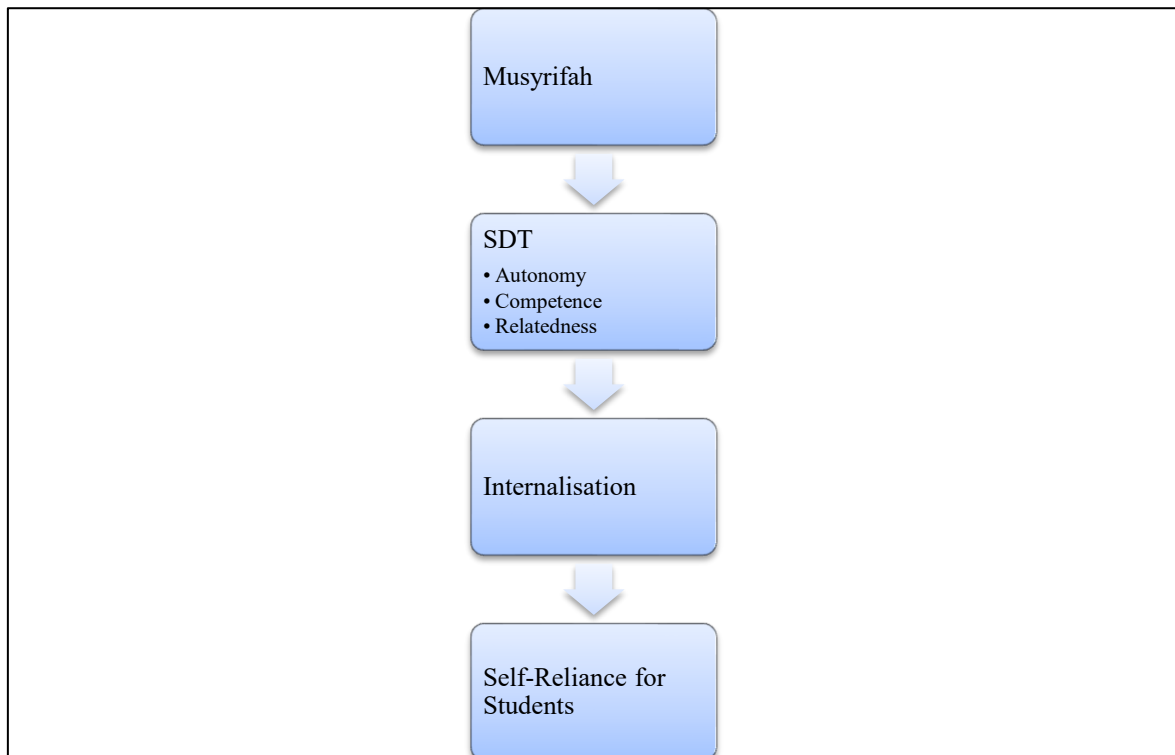


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

In this manuscript, several operational definitions are utilised. “Self-reliance” is defined as the psychological and practical capacity of a student to independently manage academic, spiritual, and social responsibilities without excessive reliance on external scaffolding (Meadley, Rickwood, & Ishikawa, 2024). “*Musyrifah*” refers to the female dormitory supervisors who act as resident mentors and primary character educators (Dewi, 2023; Susilo, Ariyanto, Inayati, & Azani, 2021). Self-determination theory variables encompass autonomy (the experience of volition and willingness), competence (the feeling of mastery and effectiveness), and relatedness (the experience of warmth, connection, and belonging) (Akram, Abidin, & Lubis, 2022). Consequently, the primary aim of this research was to investigate the interaction patterns between *musyrifah* and *santriwati* in supporting the basic psychological needs of the students and to evaluate how these interactions contributed to the authentic internalisation of self-reliance within the boarding school ecosystem.

RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this research was qualitative, employing an ethnographic approach to uncover the deeply embedded cultural and psychological dynamics of character education within a residential setting. The selection of *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2* Yogyakarta, specifically the *Muslimah* Boarding School *Ihya’ul ‘Ulum*, as the research site was based on three primary considerations. First, the distinctiveness of the programme. *MAN 2* Yogyakarta is unique as a state madrasa that has operated a boarding system since 2015. This program enables the intensive implementation of character education—particularly self-reliance—over a full 24-hour cycle. This approach offers a comparative advantage over the regular day-school system, as continuous interactions within the dormitory habituate the female students (*santriwati*) to independent living, ranging from time management and maintaining personal hygiene to making personal decisions. Second, the dormitory represents a ‘microcosm of Indonesia’. This site was selected due to the diverse regional backgrounds of its *santriwati*. Such demographic diversity makes the dormitory an ideal setting to examine how character values (such as self-reliance, honesty, and tolerance) are cultivated and internalised within a multicultural atmosphere that remains anchored in Islamic values. Third, researcher accessibility and positionality. The administration of *MAN 2* Yogyakarta demonstrated openness and provided

full institutional support for this study by facilitating access to requisite information. Furthermore, addressing researcher positionality, the primary researcher identifies as an ‘insider’ due to being an alumna of the Muslimah Boarding School *Ihya’ul ‘Ulum*. While this insider status yielded a distinct advantage in establishing emotional proximity (rapport) and ease of field accessibility—both of which are highly essential for acquiring in-depth data in qualitative research—it also necessitated careful methodological boundaries to maintain objective inquiry.

The research population comprised the entire academic and residential community at the Muslimah Boarding School *Ihya’ul ‘Ulum* of *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Yogyakarta*, which notably included a total population of sixty female students (*santriwati*). From this population, a sample was drawn utilising purposive sampling techniques to ensure the selection of informants who possessed profound, direct experience with the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018/2024; Fetterman, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sugiyono, 2013). In qualitative ethnographic research, the final number of informants is not determined by predetermined statistical quotas, but rather by the principle of data saturation. Data collection actively continued until theoretical saturation was reached—the point at which information became redundant and no new themes, categories, or substantial insights emerged from subsequent observations and interviews. Consequently, from the total population of sixty *santriwati*, data saturation was optimally achieved with a final sample consisting of four female dormitory supervisors (*musyrifah*) and three female students (*santriwati*) divided across five specific residential quarters.

The research procedures unfolded systematically, beginning with gaining institutional access, establishing rapport within the dormitory environment, and engaging in prolonged field immersion over a continuous duration of three months. This period of prolonged engagement was actively maintained to ensure the validity and credibility of the collected ethnographic data. The primary instruments for this ethnographic study were the researchers themselves, augmented by specific data collection tools: semi-structured in-depth interview guides, participatory observation checklists, and institutional documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018/2024; Fetterman, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sugiyono, 2013). To ensure sufficient depth and saturation, participatory observation was systematically structured into three intensive observation cycles. These three distinct observation phases were conducted across the full twenty-four-hour cycle of the institution to comprehensively capture the “living curriculum” and spontaneous interpersonal dynamics. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture the subjective experiences, motivational states, and psychological perceptions of both the educators and the students.

To further ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the ethnographic data, this study implemented rigorous triangulation and validation strategies. Triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying information derived from multiple sources, including interview transcripts, observational field notes, and institutional documents. Crucially, to counterbalance the researcher’s insider positionality, reflexivity was actively and rigorously practised throughout the fieldwork. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to continuously critically examine and bracket personal biases, assumptions, and emotional attachments that might inadvertently influence data interpretation. Furthermore, the researchers utilised member checking, wherein preliminary findings and interpretations were shared with the participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the captured experiences. Peer debriefing was conducted with academic colleagues to provide an external check on the inquiry process, mitigating researcher bias and ensuring methodological transparency. Finally, negative case analysis was applied to refine the working hypotheses by actively examining instances that did not initially fit the emerging themes, thereby enhancing the depth and overall credibility of the final interpretation.

The data analysis techniques rigorously followed the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) articulated by James P. Spradley (Spradley, 1980/2016). This cyclical analytical framework was executed in the past tense across several stages. First, domain analysis was conducted to identify broad categories of cultural knowledge, structuring the physical spaces and specific roles within the institution. Second, taxonomic analysis was applied to structure the internal hierarchy of the identified domains, mapping the utilisation of time and interaction types. Third, componential analysis was utilised to discover contrasting attributes in communication styles, such as rigid

authority versus supportive proxy parenting. Finally, cultural theme analysis synthesised these domains to uncover the overarching principles governing the internalisation of self-reliance, ensuring a holistic understanding of the educational ecosystem.

Table 2. Spradley’s Developmental Research Sequence Applied to Residential Education Analysis (Spradley, 1980/2016)

No	Analytical Stage	Epistemological Function	Application in Residential Education Analysis
1	Domain Analysis	Identifying broad categories of cultural knowledge and semantic relationships to organize descriptive data.	Categorizing the structural components of the institution: identifying the physical spaces, the specific roles of the actors (e.g., principal, <i>musyrifah</i> , <i>santriwati</i>), and the scheduled activities.
2	Taxonomic Analysis	Structuring the internal hierarchy and organisational relationships of the identified domains.	Mapping the hierarchy of interactions and time utilisation, such as the strict differentiation between formal instructional time, religious study, and informal dormitory socialisation.
3	Componential Analysis	Discovering the contrasting attributes and dimensions of meaning that separate terms within a single domain.	Analysing the behavioural and linguistic differences between “rigid authority” and “supportive proxy parenting” in how supervisors issue directives or handle discipline.
4	Cultural Theme Analysis	Synthesising the domains into overarching, holistic cultural principles and theoretical conclusions.	Concluding that authentic character formation relies on the fusion of religious habituation and psychological autonomy support, forming the core identity of the institution.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout this research, particularly given the involvement of adolescent *santriwati*. Prior to data collection, formal institutional approval was obtained from the leadership of *Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Yogyakarta* to ensure ethical compliance and institutional alignment. Informed consent was subsequently secured; adult participants provided direct written consent, while consent for the adolescent students was obtained from both the minors and their parents or designated legal guardians. To protect the privacy and security of all research subjects, participants’ identities were strictly anonymised using pseudonyms, and all collected digital and physical data were securely stored. This rigorous ethical framework ensured a safe psychological environment for the students to voluntarily share their experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Institutional Structural

To comprehensively understand the operationalisation of SDT principles, the physical, demographic, and temporal architecture of the residential institution must be firmly established. Empirical data gathered from facilities such as *Muslimah Boarding School Ihya’ul ‘Ulum of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Yogyakarta* serves as a representative, highly illuminating paradigm of modern Islamic boarding schools that attempt to integrate traditional religious character education with contemporary adolescent psychological needs.

The ecosystem is characterised by a specific demographic intimacy carefully designed to foster community. The facility typically houses a managed population, such as sixty female students (*santriwati*), purposefully distributed across designated residential quarters named after prominent historical Islamic figures, such as ‘Aisyah, Fatimah, Asma, Aminah, and Khodijah. This spatial segregation is not merely administrative; it creates highly cohesive micro-communities that facilitate peer-to-peer relatedness, mutual accountability, and manageable supervisor-to-student ratios, preventing the alienation often found in massive institutional dormitories (Liao, Gil, Yeh, Pereira, & Alessandretti, 2025). The educational structure is supported by a multi-tiered administrative hierarchy comprising the school principal, boarding school caretaker council, boarding school

supervisor, boarding school accountant, and crucially, the *musyrifah* who manages the residential life.

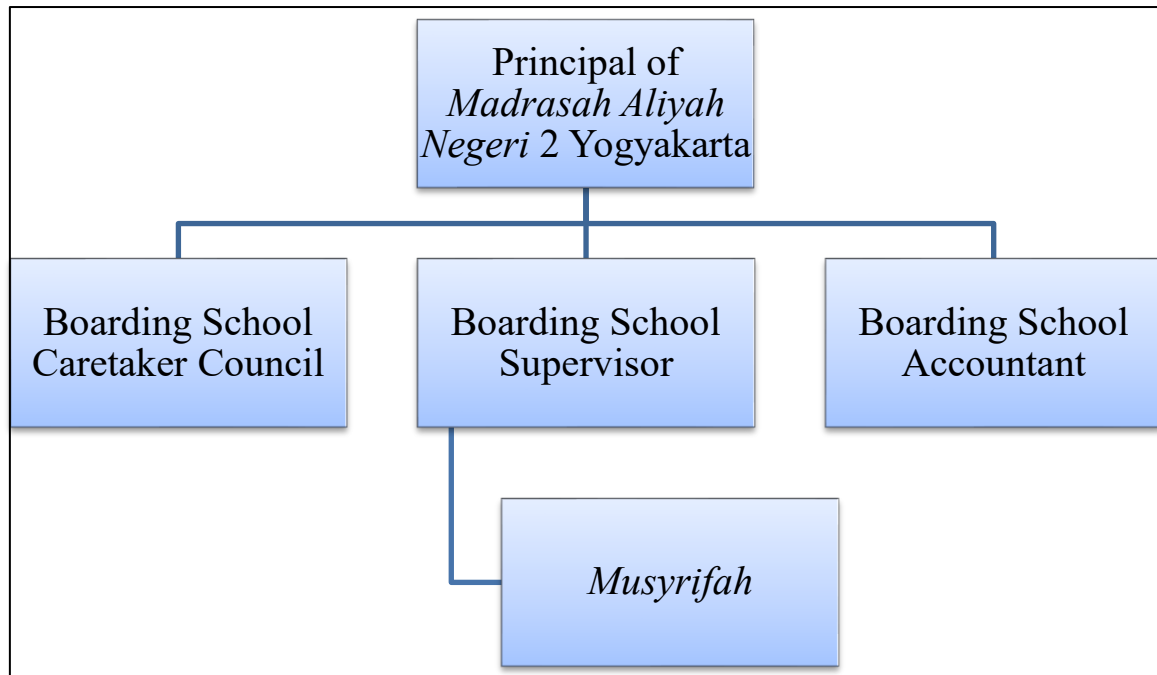


Figure 2. The Composition of the Boarding School Management

The macro-objective of this complex ecosystem is the deliberate cultivation of a holistic, “Qur’anic” character. This institutional vision rests securely on three foundational pillars: deep spiritual piety (*taqwa*), noble moral conduct, and profound social responsibility aimed at the broader welfare of the community (Cailendra, 2024). Embedded within these broad theological goals is the explicit psychological objective of cultivating self-reliance, ensuring that students evolve into capable, highly skilled individuals who can manage academic, spiritual, and social responsibilities autonomously, without over-reliance on parental or institutional scaffolding (Andrei, 2023; Fauzi et al., 2023).

Cultivating Autonomy Support: The Sticky Notes Strategy

A recurring paradox in the academic study of boarding schools is the inherent conceptual tension between the extreme structural rigidity of the institution (the highly regimented timetable) and the psychological imperative to foster autonomy. Autonomy, within the rigorous SDT framework, must not be conflated with unfettered independence, permissiveness, or anarchic freedom; rather, it denotes the vital experience of volition, willingness, and choice within a clearly structured, deeply supportive environment (Gómez-López, Mendoza-Castejón, Frías-López, & Manzano-Sánchez, 2025). Autonomy-supportive environments provide meaningful, transparent rationales for rules, actively acknowledge the students’ emotional perspectives, and offer structured opportunities for self-direction (Deci et al., 1994).

In a residential setting where macro-level activities are dictated from pre-dawn until late evening, the critical psychological space for autonomy must be carefully and deliberately carved out through cognitive and organisational exercises. One powerful manifestation of autonomy support is empowering students to manage the micro-level execution of their macro-level institutional obligations. The findings highlight highly specific, student-led interventions, such as the “sticky notes strategy”, which serves as a potent cognitive tool for developing self-reliance. Interviews with *santriwati* revealed active, conscious self-governance in managing their schedule. As one student

explained, this strategy was her primary coping mechanism to maintain control over her rigorous environment:

“My strategy is to make a priority scale, because I need time, I need control... I make sticky notes every day regarding what I need to do. I divide my time so that my screen time does not reduce my study time. Furthermore, my strategy for the culture shock and the stricter rules is just to habituate myself.” (Interview with NCSB, Student, August 4, 2024).

Demonstrating a saturation of evidence, this cognitive strategy was not an isolated case but a shared cultural practice among the students. Another student detailed the specific categorisation process of this method, highlighting intergenerational knowledge transfer within the dormitory:

“We were taught by the previous *Ustadzahs* here that if our minds are overwhelmed with the burden of tasks—such as not having washed our uniforms today, needing to print assignments for tomorrow, having to do something right after this, and so on—we should jot them down temporarily on sticky notes. Then, those written sticky notes are sorted into three categories: Now, Later, and Not at All.” (Interview with JHA, Student, August 4, 2024).

Furthermore, field observations triangulated these statements, revealing stacks of sticky notes containing various ideas, reminders, and to-do lists prominently displayed on several students’ study desks. Discussing this finding through the lens of self-determination theory, this behaviour represents a successful transition from external regulation to identified regulation. Identified regulation occurs when an individual consciously values a goal and accepts the behaviour as personally important (Septianingtias & Herwin, 2022). Rather than *musyrifahs* micromanaging every single minute of a student’s available free time, the students were encouraged and trained to create personal daily priority scales. By visually organising their tasks—meticulously balancing academic study, rigorous religious memorisation, and necessary leisure activities—the students engage in active, conscious self-governance.

Crucially, this student-led autonomy is structurally supported by the institution’s approach to independent time. The educational environment deliberately provides dedicated blocks of time, specifically the 19:45 to 21:30 window designated explicitly for “independent activities” (Cailendra, 2024). A *musyrifah* explicitly confirmed this non-coercive approach, particularly regarding students’ academic enrichment:

“Academically, they have tutoring sessions. Whether they participate or not is their choice. Essentially, we facilitate it... Their time is freed up (for this) ... So, they do not neglect their responsibilities while here.” (Interview with SIA, 2024).

This perspective from the educator illustrates that the institution provides the spatial and temporal freedom required to exercise and refine executive functioning and self-management skills. This aligns with contemporary educational research demonstrating that autonomy-supportive environments—where students are provided with meaningful choices and encouraged to take initiative—significantly enhance intrinsic motivation and academic self-regulation (Sasmita & Wantini, 2023). Ultimately, the students perceived the act of time management and studying not as an externally imposed, oppressive burden, but as a deeply valued personal objective connected to their future success, demonstrating authentic self-reliance (Ryan et al., 2022).

Relatedness and the Proxy Parenting Model

Within the SDT framework, the successful internalisation of challenging, restrictive, or highly demanding rules relies heavily on the profound fulfilment of the need for relatedness (Akram et al., 2022). If a student feels emotionally disconnected, alienated, or constantly threatened by rigid authority figures, they are highly likely to regress to external or introjected regulation—obeying only to avoid punitive measures or physical sanctions to preserve their fragile ego (Fredricks, Ye, Wang, & Brauer, 2019). Conversely, when dormitory supervisors establish deep, emotionally resonant, and empathetic relationships, adolescents are significantly more likely to identify with and internalise the values being transmitted (Dewi, 2023; Lanxi & Yi, 2024).

The findings further highlighted the critical nature of interpersonal communication in fulfilling the need for relatedness. Observational data and interviews demonstrated that the *musyrifah* actively rejected the role of rigid institutional enforcers, adopting instead a familial dynamic. Crucially, this approach was uniformly implemented across the supervisory team rather than being an isolated preference. Regarding disciplinary actions, one *musyrifah* explicitly noted their approach to preserving student dignity:

“We do not reprimand them in a public forum, so we prefer to invite internal communication, which is face-to-face.” (Interview with RK, *Musyrifah*, July 30, 2024).

Corroborating this relational consistency, another supervisor emphasised the institutional habit of continuous, open dialogue:

“Every time there is an opportunity, we try to always communicate with the children so they can share. Sharing is caring. The hope is that they can be open (with us).” (Interview with SNIA, *Musyrifah*, 2024).

Furthermore, establishing this psychological safety requires specific emotional competencies. As articulated by another supervisor, a *musyrifah* must consciously cultivate a persona that is “open, easy-going, and ‘*ngemong*’ (nurturing)”, possessing the emotional maturity and patience required to balance the adolescents’ shifting emotions (Interview with URJ, *Musyrifah*, 2024).

This familial dynamic is established and sustained through highly specific, observable communication strategies. Rather than utilising authoritarian, teacher-centred communication characterised by one-way directives, interactions are highly personal, dialogic, and responsive. Supervisors consciously dismantle artificial rigidity, intentionally integrating humour, active listening, and informal storytelling into their daily contact with students (Ryan et al., 2022). Students corroborated this sense of psychological safety, reporting that the supervisors were “not stiff”, which allowed them to share personal stories and seek help without fear (Interview with HSA, Student, August 4, 2024). Within this secure psychological container, adolescents feel safe enough to disclose personal difficulties, academic anxieties, and social conflicts without the paralysing fear of immediate judgement or harsh reprisal (Gonsalves, Nair, Roy, Pal, & Michelson, 2023).

This finding is highly relevant to the proxy parenting or pseudo-parent model increasingly identified in modern character education literature (Dariotis et al., 2023). In the absence of biological parents, the fulfilment of the adolescent’s need for emotional warmth and connection relies entirely on the accessibility and empathy of residential mentors (Akram et al., 2022). By addressing infractions privately rather than through public shaming, the *musyrifah* protected the fragile self-esteem of the adolescents, thereby satisfying the fundamental need for relatedness. SDT literature confirms that when the need for relatedness is thwarted through controlling or humiliating practices, students regress to introjected regulation, obeying merely out of guilt or fear (Brambilla, Assor, Manzi, & Regalia, 2015). Conversely, the secure emotional bond established through the proxy parenting model lowered the affective filter, making students highly receptive to the moral and practical values being modelled by their supervisors.

The effectiveness of the proxy parent model is further amplified by the demographic phenomenon known as “mentor proximity”. Field data analysis from this boarding school indicates a relatively narrow chronological age gap between the *musyrifah* (who are frequently active university students or recent young graduates) and the high-school-aged *santriwati*. This proximity effectively bridges deep generational divides that often hinder communication in traditional family structures, allowing supervisors to act simultaneously as authoritative, morally grounded guides and as highly relatable, older siblings. The senior-junior mentoring system significantly strengthens supportive relationships, instils a sense of shared social responsibility, and lowers the affective filter that typically impedes adolescent receptivity to advice (Shafaei, Nejati, Omari, & Sharafizad, 2024).

To clarify the distinction between the data gathered from the field and the theoretical framework applied, the transition from an institutional to a relational authority paradigm is mapped

in Table 3. This conceptual synthesis visually correlates the visual templates with standard academic classifications.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Institutional vs. Relational Authority Frameworks

No	Authority Paradigm	Empirical Observation: Communication Style	Empirical Observation: Conflict Resolution	Theoretical Interpretation: SDT Need Addressed	Theoretical Interpretation: Internalisation Outcome
1	Institutional Enforcer	Hierarchical, rigid, one-way directives.	Public reprimand, shaming, punitive sanctions.	Thwarts relatedness and autonomy.	External/introjected regulation (compliance driven by fear and peer pressure).
2	Relational Proxy Parent	Fluid, empathetic, dialogic, accessible.	Private, face-to-face mediation and rationale provision.	Satisfies relatedness and autonomy.	Identified/integrated regulation (values are understood and self-endorsed).

This table represents a conceptual synthesis constructed by the authors. The “Communication Style” and “Conflict Resolution” columns reflect empirical findings derived from ethnographic field data, whereas the “SDT Need Addressed” and “Internalisation Outcome” columns represent theoretical interpretations based on existing self-determination theory literature.

Competence and the ‘Silent Educator’

The relational dynamics provided by proxy parents effectively address the psychological needs for relatedness and autonomy. Meanwhile, the fulfilment of the need for competence relies heavily on the structural predictability of the environment and the availability of diverse avenues for mastery (Akram et al., 2022). Competence is successfully nurtured when an individual clearly understands the high expectations placed upon them, receives constructive feedback, and feels adequately equipped with the necessary skills to meet those expectations (Gómez-López et al., 2025).

Modern Islamic boarding schools increasingly recognise that true, enduring self-reliance requires a diverse, multifaceted toolkit of competencies that extend far beyond rote academic learning or the memorisation of religious texts. Consequently, institutional support for highly varied life skills directly feeds into the SDT requirement for competence (Akram et al., 2022). The curriculum required to achieve these dual academic and theological goals is inherently hybrid, merging the state-mandated academic requirements of a standard *madrasah aliyah* with the intensive, immersive theological training of a traditional *pesantren*.

In the context of fulfilling the need for competence, the architecture of the 24-hour dormitory schedule (from 03:30 to 21:30) serves as a provider of predictable ‘structure’. This institutionalised schedule essentially acts as a ‘silent educator’, forming the foundational framework for the *santriwati*’s discipline that facilitates the continuous process of behavioural habituation, encompassing foreign language acquisition (typically Arabic and English); congregational prayers; academic schooling; religious memorisation (*tahfidz*); physical education; and life skills training such as public speaking and debate training and practical domestic skills such as cooking, which are seamlessly integrated into the holistic curriculum (Interview with RK, *Musyrifah*, July 30, 2024). The relentless sequencing of congregational morning prayers, formal academic schooling, afternoon religious studies, and evening reviews fundamentally rewires the adolescent’s chronobiology, executive functioning, and behavioural defaults (Syafi’i & Mulya, 2024). However, based on field observations, the absence of mechanical instruments such as dormitory bells necessitates the *musyrifah* to continue providing verbal instructions prior to activity transitions (such as calls to wake up or prepare for Qur’anic recitation) as transitional cues.

Interestingly, the *santriwati*’s responses to these routines and verbal instructions vary significantly, which confirms the manifestation of the internalisation continuum within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2022). Some *santriwati* remain at the external regulation stage, where they are highly dependent on the *musyrifahs*’ instructions or their roommates’ reminders to take action. Conversely, for the *santriwati* who have successfully internalised the dormitory values, the schedule truly becomes a silent educator. They have reached the identified regulation stage,

where activity transitions—such as taking the initiative to bathe and prepare themselves—are executed through autonomous awareness without the need for verbal intervention. This indicates that self-reliance in a boarding school setting is not an instantaneous outcome of a rigid schedule but rather a psychological transition process from external compliance to internal awareness.

Table 4. Educational Domains and the “Silent Educator” Temporal Architecture in Madrasah Aliyah (Cailendra, 2024)

No	Time Phase	Activity Domain	Cognitive/Character Function	Competence Developed
1	03:30 - 06:00	<i>Tahajjud</i> (night prayer), <i>Subuh</i> (dawn prayer), morning preparation.	Spiritual discipline, emotional self-regulation, delayed gratification.	Internal locus of control; physical endurance and routine adherence.
2	07:00 - 15:00	Formal academic curriculum (state mandated subjects).	Cognitive expansion, analytical reasoning, academic mastery.	Academic competence; intellectual autonomy and critical thinking.
3	16:30 - 18:00	<i>Diniyyah</i> (Religious studies), <i>Tahfidz</i> (Qur'an memorisation).	Moral literacy, theological grounding, extensive memory retention.	Religious fluency; ethical decision-making capabilities and cognitive stamina.
4	19:45 - 21:30	Independent study/activities	Executive functioning, task prioritisation, self-governance.	Time management; task-oriented self-reliance and autonomous planning.

This structural predictability functions as a “silent educator”. In the discussion of competence within SDT, an individual must feel capable of navigating their environment and meeting the expectations placed upon them (Wang et al., 2024). The relentless, yet predictable, sequencing of diverse activities inherently trained the students’ physical endurance, delayed gratification, and cognitive stamina. By diversifying the avenues for mastery (e.g., succeeding in culinary arts if one struggles in advanced mathematics), the institution ensured that the fundamental need for competence was met across a broad spectrum of the student body. The mastery of this rigorous schedule instilled a profound sense of self-efficacy, a critical component of enduring self-reliance.

Crucially, this sense of competence and mastery was explicitly voiced by the *santriwati* themselves. Rather than merely being swept along by the schedule, students articulated a strong feeling of control and capability. Regarding time management and self-control, one student confidently described her mastery over her routine:

“For my strategy, I set a list of priorities. Because, as I mentioned, I need time and I need control, so I prioritise. I make sticky notes every day detailing what I need to do. I manage my time so that my screen time does not cut into my study time. As for my strategy regarding the culture shock and the stricter rules, it is simply about getting used to it.” (Interview with NCSB, Student, August 4, 2024).

Furthermore, this efficacy extended beyond individual schedule management into social competence. The environment successfully fostered the students’ confidence to navigate peer interactions and collective decision-making. Acknowledging this social capability, another student noted:

“Ideally, we should deliberate (*musyawarah*). We must understand the thoughts and opinions of many people so that we can integrate them into a single idea and agree upon it together.” (Interview with HSA, Student, August 4, 2024).

These verbatim accounts demonstrate that the students did not just comply with the structure; they actively felt equipped, capable, and competent in managing both their personal and social responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research problems and the analysed data, it can be generalised that the successful cultivation of character within residential educational environments is profoundly dependent on the quality of psychological nourishment provided by educators. The mere existence of a rigorous institutional schedule is insufficient to guarantee the authentic internalisation of values. Self-reliance evolves from a state of fragile, fear-based compliance into an enduring personal trait only when the environment systematically satisfies the innate adolescent needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The evolution of the dormitory supervisor from a detached disciplinarian into a relational “proxy parent” who utilises private communication and models’ autonomous behaviour is the critical catalyst for this psychological transition.

Despite these significant insights, it is important to acknowledge several limitations inherent in this study. Primarily, this research was conducted as a single-site study focused exclusively on one institution, meaning the findings may not be entirely generalisable to the vast and diverse array of boarding schools across Indonesia. Furthermore, the qualitative ethnographic approach, while providing deep contextual insights, carries the inherent risk of observer bias during participatory observation and data interpretation, necessitating rigorous reflexivity throughout the research process. Future research involving larger, multi-site samples is necessary to validate and extend these findings across different educational settings.

Based on these findings, several implicative recommendations are proposed. For educational practice, boarding school administrators should integrate self-determination theory principles into the professional development and training of all dormitory supervisors, emphasising non-controlling communication and autonomy-supportive mentoring. From a policy perspective, institutions must proactively design their daily schedules not just for maximum academic or religious output but also to ensure dedicated temporal spaces where students can exercise independent cognitive initiative. More specifically, at the national policy level, it is recommended to integrate an SDT-based character mentoring module into the *musyrifah* training curriculum, which can be operationalised within the formal teacher certification programs mandated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama RI). For future researchers, it is highly suggested to investigate the “character decay rate”—the potential regression of internalised self-reliance when students transition from the autonomy-supportive boarding environment back to domestic settings with differing parental control styles—utilising longitudinal, mixed-methods designs.

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