

Embodied Islamic Character Education through Performing Arts: A Phenomenological Study of *Panggung Gembira*

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Abstract

This study explores the role of *Panggung Gembira* as a medium of embodied Islamic character education at *Pondok Modern*. The research aims to analyze how performing arts activities contribute to the formation of Islamic character among sixth-grade female students through lived educational experiences. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study collected data through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The participants consisted of sixth-grade female students involved in organizing and performing *Panggung Gembira*. Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to identify themes emerging from students' experiences during the preparation and performance processes. The findings reveal that *Panggung Gembira* functions not merely as an artistic performance, but as an embodied educational arena integrating cooperation, conflict management, creativity, self-management, self-evaluation, leadership, and independence within the *pesantren* culture. Islamic values were internalized through collective artistic practices, emotional engagement, organizational responsibility, and reflective interaction. The study further demonstrates that performing arts in *pesantren* serve as a hidden curriculum through which students experience moral and spiritual formation beyond formal classroom instruction. This research contributes to contemporary Islamic education discourse by positioning performing arts as a transformative pedagogical space for embodied religiosity, female leadership development, and experiential character education in modern *pesantren*.

Keywords: Epistemic Sovereignty, Islamic Education, Secular Governance, Knowledge Legitimacy

Article History:

Received: July 2025; Revised: September 2025; Accepted: November 2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/edsojou.v3i2.2374>

How to Cite:

Armansyah, A. N. K., Syarifah, Nurhasanah, M., & Rahmawati, N. (2025). Embodied Islamic Character Education through Performing Arts: A Phenomenological Study of *Panggung Gembira*. *Education and Sociedad Journal*, 3(2), 70-82.

INTRODUCTION

Modern

Character education has become a prominent concern in contemporary educational discourse due to increasing challenges associated with moral decline, individualism, ethical misconduct, and the weakening of spiritual awareness among younger generations in the digital era. Educational institutions are increasingly expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate values, attitudes, and behaviors that support responsible citizenship and personal integrity. Within Islamic education, character education extends beyond cognitive moral instruction and emphasizes the internalization of religious values through lived experience, habituation, and the cultivation of a holistic educational environment. This perspective positions character formation as a continuous process embedded within students' everyday lives rather than as an isolated

component of formal instruction.

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) play a strategic role in this process because they integrate academic, spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions within a residential educational system. The boarding environment enables educational values to be reinforced through daily interactions, communal living, and institutional culture. Previous studies have demonstrated that *pesantren* education contributes significantly to the development of moral discipline, social responsibility, religious commitment, and moderate Islamic attitudes among students (Fauzi et al., 2022; Mujahid, 2021). These findings suggest that character education in *pesantren* operates through comprehensive educational experiences that encompass both formal and informal learning settings.

Recent scholarship further indicates that character formation in *pesantren* is not limited to classroom-based instruction. Rather, it is shaped through hidden curricula, role modeling, habituation, collective discipline, and various extracurricular activities that structure students' everyday experiences. Mujahid (2021) argues that modern *pesantren* cultivate moderate Muslim identities through the internalization of Islamic values embedded in daily practices. Similarly, Sopandi et al. (2025) found that effective character education depends on the integration of formal and informal educational systems that transform every student activity into a medium of moral learning. Such perspectives align with the concept of embodied education, which emphasizes that values are not merely understood cognitively but are also experienced physically, emotionally, and socially through participation in meaningful practices.

Within this framework, performing arts represent a potentially important yet underexplored medium for character formation. Although artistic activities are sometimes perceived within certain Muslim communities as forms of entertainment that may divert attention from spiritual development, other perspectives regard them as legitimate instruments of aesthetic expression, cultural transmission, and da'wah. Empirical studies have shown that arts education contributes positively to the development of creativity, empathy, emotional regulation, leadership, collaboration, and social awareness among students (Rochmania et al., 2022). Furthermore, Sauri et al. (2022) emphasize that artistic and musical activities in *pesantren* can function as pedagogical spaces for cultivating the identity of *insan kamil* through the integration of spiritual and social values. These findings indicate that performing arts can serve not only as aesthetic activities but also as transformative educational spaces where character values are enacted and experienced.

One educational institution that systematically integrates artistic activities into its educational philosophy is Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. As one of the most influential modern *pesantren* in Indonesia, Gontor is guided by the principle that "everything seen, heard, and felt is education," reflecting its commitment to embedding educational values throughout all aspects of student life. This philosophy positions extracurricular and cultural activities as important instruments of character development. Among these activities, *Panggung Gembira*, an annual performing arts event organized by sixth-grade female students at Gontor for Girls Campus 1, represents a unique educational phenomenon. More than a platform for artistic performance, *Panggung Gembira* functions as a collective learning space in which students engage in leadership, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, conflict resolution, emotional management, and the practical enactment of Islamic values throughout the process of planning, organizing, and performing artistic productions.

Despite growing scholarly attention to character education in *pesantren*, existing studies have predominantly focused on formal curricula, religious habituation, leadership of *kyai*, and disciplinary systems (Muhyiddin et al., 2022; Syarnubi et al., 2021). Research specifically examining performing arts as a medium of embodied Islamic character education remains limited, particularly

in relation to the lived experiences of female students in modern *pesantren* settings. Existing studies on arts in *pesantren* generally conceptualize artistic activities as instruments of creativity development or da'wah, rather than as phenomenological spaces where Islamic character values are experienced, negotiated, and embodied through social interaction, emotional engagement, and collective performance. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how character formation emerges through the bodily, emotional, social, and spiritual experiences associated with performing arts activities in *pesantren* environments.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how *Panggung Gembira* functions as a medium of embodied Islamic character education among sixth-grade female students at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor for Girls Campus 1. Employing a phenomenological approach, this study explores students' lived experiences throughout the artistic, social, and spiritual processes involved in preparing and performing *Panggung Gembira*. This research contributes to contemporary discussions on Islamic education, hidden curriculum, and character formation while offering a deeper understanding of how performing arts facilitate the embodiment of Islamic values within modern *pesantren* education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of sixth-grade female students participating in *Panggung Gembira* at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor for Girls Campus 1. Phenomenology is particularly appropriate for examining how individuals interpret, experience, and internalize meanings within specific social and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The approach enables researchers to understand how Islamic character education is embodied through artistic, emotional, social, and spiritual experiences that emerge during the preparation and performance processes of *Panggung Gembira*. As noted by Smith et al. (2021), phenomenological inquiry focuses on how individuals make sense of significant experiences and how meaning is constructed through reflection and social interaction. Therefore, this approach was considered suitable for investigating the ways in which students experience and internalize Islamic character values through participation in performing arts activities within the *pesantren* environment.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor for Girls Campus 1, Mantingan, Ngawi, East Java, Indonesia. This institution was selected because *Panggung Gembira* constitutes an annual performing arts tradition that is deeply embedded within the *pesantren's* educational philosophy and student development system. The event serves not only as an artistic performance but also as an educational process involving leadership, collaboration, responsibility, and character formation.

Participants consisted of sixth-grade female students who were actively involved in organizing and performing *Panggung Gembira*, including committee coordinators, performers, stage designers, and student leaders. In addition, teacher informants and institutional representatives were included to provide broader perspectives regarding educational objectives, supervision processes, and institutional values. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and substantial experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is widely recommended in phenomenological research because it facilitates the selection of information-rich participants who can provide meaningful insights into lived experiences (Cypress, 2021).

Table 1. Research Participants and Their Roles

Participant Code	Participant Category	Role in <i>Panggung Gembira</i>	Position in <i>Pesantren</i>		Main Data Contribution
P1	Student Participant	General Chairperson	Sixth-grade student	female	Leadership experience and organizational management
P2	Student Participant	Artistic Coordinator	Sixth-grade student	female	Creativity and artistic concept development
P3	Student Participant	Stage Performer	Sixth-grade student	female	Emotional engagement and performance experience
P4	Student Participant	Decoration Division	Sixth-grade student	female	Collaborative work and aesthetic production
P5	Student Participant	Event Coordinator	Sixth-grade student	female	Conflict management and teamwork
P6	Student Participant	Consumption Division	Sixth-grade student	female	Responsibility and self-management
P7	Student Participant	Lighting and Technical Division	Sixth-grade student	female	Technical coordination and problem-solving
P8	Student Participant	Master of Ceremony	Sixth-grade student	female	Public communication and confidence building
P9	Teacher Informant	Mentor Teacher	Homeroom Teacher		Guidance and character supervision
P10	Teacher Informant	Boarding Supervisor	<i>Pesantren</i> Caregiver		Observation of students' behavioral development
P11	Teacher Informant	Artistic Advisor	Teacher and Performance Supervisor		Evaluation of Islamic values in performances
P12	Institutional Informant	Vice Director of Student Affairs	<i>Pesantren</i> Management		Institutional philosophy and educational objectives

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions, emotions, reflections, and interpretations concerning the educational values embedded in *Panggung Gembira*. This technique allowed participants to describe their experiences freely while enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes relevant to embodied character education.

Participant observation was undertaken throughout the preparation and performance stages to capture naturally occurring interactions, leadership practices, collaborative activities, emotional regulation, artistic processes, and social dynamics among students. Observational data provided direct insight into how educational values were enacted and experienced within the context of performing arts activities.

To strengthen contextual understanding and data triangulation, documentation studies were also conducted. Documents analyzed included activity schedules, performance scripts, organizational records, photographs, and institutional archives related to the implementation of *Panggung Gembira*. The integration of interviews, observations, and documentation is recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing the depth, credibility, and contextual richness of qualitative phenomenological research (Creely et al., 2021; Ward & Delamont, 2020).

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This analytical approach seeks to understand how participants interpret and construct meaning from their lived experiences while simultaneously considering the broader social and cultural contexts

surrounding those experiences (Smith et al., 2021).

The analysis process involved several stages. First, the researcher immersed themselves in the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials. Second, initial coding was conducted to identify meaningful statements and experiential descriptions related to character formation. Third, emergent themes were developed from recurring patterns across participants' narratives. Fourth, related themes were clustered into broader thematic categories representing shared experiences and meanings. Finally, interpretative reflection was conducted to explore how educational values such as cooperation, creativity, self-management, leadership, independence, and emotional control were embodied through participation in *Panggung Gembira* and situated within the educational culture of the *pesantren*.

Table 2. Stages of *Panggung Gembira* Preparation and Performance

Stage	Main Activities	Participants Involved	Educational Values Developed	Forms of Embodied Experience
Initial Planning	Theme selection, committee formation, division assignment	Committee leaders, student coordinators, teachers	Responsibility, leadership, collective commitment	Decision-making and organizational responsibility
Concept Development	Script writing, artistic discussions, performance design	Artistic division, performers, mentors	Creativity, collaboration, critical thinking	Negotiation of ideas and aesthetic expression
Rehearsal Process	Performance practice, choreography, vocal training, stage simulation	Performers, technical teams, mentors	Discipline, perseverance, emotional control	Physical practice and emotional engagement
Technical Preparation	Stage decoration, lighting arrangement, sound system preparation	Technical division, decoration team	Problem-solving, teamwork, time management	Coordination under pressure and technical adaptation
Performance Execution	Public performance and artistic presentation	All student participants	Confidence, responsibility, cooperation	Public expression and collective accountability
Evaluation and Reflection	Feedback sessions, mentoring, collective discussion	Teachers, mentors, student committees	Self-evaluation, humility, self-improvement	Reflective awareness and moral evaluation

Source: Data derived from participant observation, interviews, and institutional documentation during the implementation of Panggung Gembira (2025).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed, including triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and reflexive interpretation. Triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary sources. Member checking was conducted by returning interview interpretations to participants for confirmation and verification of meaning. Prolonged engagement in the field enabled the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the educational culture surrounding *Panggung Gembira*.

Furthermore, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to minimize potential researcher bias and enhance interpretative transparency. The researcher continuously reflected on assumptions, positionality, and analytical decisions during data collection and interpretation. These procedures are widely recognized as essential mechanisms for maintaining credibility, dependability, and rigor in qualitative phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Cypress, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Panggung Gembira* functions not merely as a performing arts event, but as an embodied educational space in which Islamic character values are internalized through collective artistic experiences, organizational responsibilities, and social interaction. Based on observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies, the researchers identified six dominant dimensions of character formation experienced by sixth-grade female students: cooperation, conflict management, creativity, self-management, self-evaluation, and independence. These dimensions emerged organically throughout the preparation and performance processes of *Panggung Gembira* and were consistently reinforced through the *pesantren's* educational culture, guidance system, and habituation practices.

Cooperation as Collective Moral Practice

One of the most prominent findings concerns the formation of collaborative character through collective performance practices. Observational data revealed that all divisions involved in *Panggung Gembira* preparation—including stage decoration, lighting, costumes, artistic performance, publication, and event management—worked interdependently to ensure the success of the event. The students demonstrated intensive coordination, shared responsibility, and mutual assistance during the preparation process. An interview with one student coordinator revealed:

“In Panggung Gembira, we cannot work individually because every performance depends on other divisions. We learned how to trust, communicate, and help each other even under pressure.”

This finding was strengthened by field observations showing that students voluntarily assisted other committees beyond their formal responsibilities, especially during technical difficulties and time-sensitive situations. Documentation records further indicated that collaborative meetings and collective evaluations were routinely conducted throughout the preparation stages. These findings suggest that cooperation in *Panggung Gembira* operates not merely as organizational teamwork, but as a moral practice grounded in Islamic values of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) and collective responsibility.

Conflict Management and Emotional Regulation

The study also found that *Panggung Gembira* became an important medium for developing students' conflict management and emotional regulation skills. During observations, conflicts frequently emerged due to differences in artistic opinions, technical constraints, scheduling problems, and communication misunderstandings among committee members. However, rather than becoming destructive, these tensions became educational opportunities through guided discussion and collective problem-solving. One participant explained:

“There were moments when we disagreed about concepts or technical decisions, but our mentors reminded us to prioritize unity and solve problems wisely.”

Interview data indicated that students gradually learned how to negotiate, compromise, and manage emotional reactions during stressful situations. Observational findings showed that senior mentors and teachers played an important role in facilitating conflict resolution through advice, mediation, and reflective discussions. Institutional documentation also demonstrated the existence of structured evaluation sessions intended to encourage self-reflection and emotional maturity among students.

These findings indicate that conflict within *Panggung Gembira* was pedagogically transformed into a process of emotional education. Through repeated interaction and collective responsibility, students learned patience, self-control, empathy, and decision-making skills in accordance with Islamic ethical principles.

Creativity and Artistic Expression

Another significant finding concerns the development of creativity through performing arts practices. The preparation of *Panggung Gembira* required students to conceptualize themes, design stage decorations, arrange performances, produce scripts, manage artistic details, and create innovative presentations while maintaining Islamic values and *pesantren* norms.

Observation data showed that students actively explored new artistic concepts and attempted to produce performances distinct from previous years. One student stated:

"We wanted this year's Panggung Gembira to have a different identity, so we continuously discussed new ideas while ensuring they still reflected Islamic values."

Documentation analysis revealed that students independently designed costumes, stage layouts, musical arrangements, and performance concepts with minimal external involvement. Interviews further indicated that students perceived creativity not simply as artistic freedom, but as responsible innovation guided by Islamic ethics and *pesantren* philosophy.

The findings suggest that creativity in *Panggung Gembira* was developed through experiential learning processes in which students negotiated between artistic expression, institutional values, and collective expectations. Creativity therefore emerged as both an aesthetic and moral competency.

Self-Management and Leadership Formation

The study further revealed that participation in *Panggung Gembira* contributed significantly to students' self-management abilities, particularly in managing time, emotions, responsibilities, and leadership roles. Observational findings indicated that sixth-grade students simultaneously handled academic responsibilities, organizational duties, dormitory obligations, and event preparation activities. One interview participant explained:

"At first, it was very difficult to divide time between school activities and Panggung Gembira preparation, but gradually we learned discipline and responsibility."

Field observations showed that students frequently worked under intense schedules and high expectations, requiring them to regulate stress, maintain emotional stability, and prioritize responsibilities effectively. Leadership formation also emerged strongly during the preparation process, particularly among committee coordinators and division leaders responsible for supervising large teams.

Documentation data demonstrated that leadership structures within *Panggung Gembira* mirrored organizational systems commonly practiced in *pesantren* education, emphasizing discipline, accountability, and collective service. Through this process, students developed confidence, decision-making abilities, and organizational maturity.

Self-Evaluation and Reflective Consciousness

The findings additionally indicate that *Panggung Gembira* facilitated students' self-evaluation and reflective awareness. Throughout the preparation process, students continuously received feedback from teachers, mentors, judges, and peers regarding performance quality, discipline, teamwork, and personal attitudes. One student reflected:

“Every correction from teachers became part of our learning process. We realized that improving ourselves was more important than merely creating a good performance.”

Observations revealed that evaluation sessions were conducted not only to assess technical performance but also to strengthen students’ awareness of sincerity, humility, responsibility, and self-improvement. Documentation records further showed that reflective discussions and mentoring sessions were institutionalized within the event preparation process. These findings suggest that self-evaluation in *Panggung Gembira* functioned as a process of *muhasabah* (self-reflection) through which students critically examined their attitudes, emotional responses, and personal growth within the framework of Islamic morality.

Independence and Responsibility

Finally, the study found that *Panggung Gembira* significantly strengthened students’ independence and responsibility. Observations demonstrated that students independently managed event planning, artistic production, budgeting, decoration construction, costume preparation, and technical coordination with limited direct intervention from teachers. One participant stated:

“We were trusted to organize everything ourselves, and that trust made us more responsible and confident.”

Documentation data showed that students carried out nearly all operational aspects of the event autonomously, including stage preparation, rehearsal management, artistic production, and performance execution. Interviews further revealed that students perceived independence not merely as personal autonomy, but as the ability to contribute responsibly to collective goals.

These findings demonstrate that *Panggung Gembira* operates as a multidimensional educational arena in which Islamic character is embodied through artistic practice, social interaction, organizational experience, and emotional engagement. The internalization of character values occurred not through formal instruction alone, but through lived experience, collective struggle, and continuous habituation within the *pesantren* environment.

Table 3. Embodied Islamic Character Values Found in *Panggung Gembira*

Character Dimension	Embodied Practices in <i>Panggung Gembira</i>	Participants’ Lived Experiences	Supporting Data Sources	Islamic Educational Meaning
Cooperation (<i>Ta’awun</i>)	Collaborative stage preparation, division coordination, mutual assistance	Students learned to prioritize collective goals over personal interests	Observation, interviews, documentation	Strengthening social solidarity and collective responsibility
Leadership	Managing committees, supervising divisions, decision-making	Students developed confidence and organizational maturity	Interviews and observation	Developing responsible and service-oriented leadership
Creativity	Designing performances, scripts, costumes, and stage concepts	Students negotiated artistic innovation within Islamic values	Observation and documentation	Encouraging ethical creativity and Islamic aesthetics
Self-Management	Managing schedules, emotions, and academic responsibilities	Students experienced discipline and emotional regulation under pressure	Interviews and field observation	Cultivating discipline (<i>intizam</i>) and self-control
Conflict Management	Resolving disagreements during preparation and rehearsals	Students practiced negotiation, patience, and compromise	Interviews and observation	Internalizing emotional maturity and Islamic ethics

Self-Evaluation (<i>Muhasabah</i>)	Reflective discussions and performance evaluations	Students critically reflected on attitudes and personal growth	Documentation and interviews	Developing humility and continuous self-improvement
Independence	Organizing performances autonomously with minimal teacher intervention	Students became more confident and responsible	Observation and documentation	Strengthening autonomy and accountability
Responsibility (<i>Amanah</i>)	Completing assigned tasks and maintaining event quality	Students learned commitment toward collective duties	Observation and interviews	Internalizing trustworthiness and moral commitment

*Source: Synthesized from participant observations, in-depth interviews, and institutional documentation during the implementation of *Panggung Gembira* at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Campus 1 (2025).

Table 3 summarizes the embodied Islamic character values identified throughout the implementation of *Panggung Gembira*. The findings indicate that character formation occurred through a variety of interconnected artistic, organizational, and social practices that enabled students to experience Islamic values in concrete and meaningful ways. Cooperation (*ta'awun*) emerged through collaborative work and mutual assistance, while leadership was developed through committee management and decision-making responsibilities. Creativity was expressed through the design of performances, scripts, costumes, and stage concepts that remained aligned with Islamic values. The study also found that self-management, conflict management, and self-evaluation (*muhasabah*) were cultivated through students' efforts to regulate emotions, resolve interpersonal challenges, and engage in reflective learning processes. Furthermore, independence and responsibility (*amanah*) were strengthened through students' active involvement in organizing and executing the event with a high degree of autonomy. These findings demonstrate that *Panggung Gembira* functioned not merely as a performing arts activity but as an experiential educational space in which Islamic character values were embodied through lived experiences, collective participation, and continuous reflection within the *pesantren* environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Panggung Gembira* functions as an embodied pedagogical arena in which Islamic character education is internalized through artistic practice, emotional engagement, collective responsibility, and lived social interaction. Unlike conventional models of character education that emphasize cognitive moral instruction, the educational process observed in *Panggung Gembira* positions character formation as a lived and performative experience. This finding reinforces recent scholarship arguing that *pesantren*-based character education operates holistically through habituation, exemplary practices, institutional culture, and daily social interaction rather than through formal curriculum alone (Fauzi et al., 2022; Mustaqim et al., 2025).

More importantly, this study expands existing discussions by demonstrating that performing arts in *pesantren* are not merely supplementary extracurricular activities, but function as a hidden curriculum through which Islamic ethical values are embodied and negotiated collectively. Previous studies on *pesantren* character education primarily emphasized discipline systems, religious rituals, kitab learning, or kyai leadership as dominant mechanisms of moral formation (Islamy, 2022; Sumarno et al., 2025). However, this study reveals that artistic performance itself constitutes a pedagogical structure capable of shaping moral consciousness, emotional maturity, and collective ethics through experiential participation. In this sense, *Panggung Gembira* transforms art from aesthetic consumption into moral praxis.

Theoretically, the findings support embodied learning theory, which argues that knowledge and values are internalized not solely through cognition but through bodily experience, emotional practice, and social engagement. The sixth-grade female students did not simply “learn about” cooperation, leadership, discipline, or emotional control conceptually; rather, they experienced these values through physical rehearsal, organizational struggle, collective deadlines, interpersonal conflict, and public performance. Such findings indicate that Islamic character education becomes more transformative when values are experienced through situated practice rather than abstract moral instruction alone. Affective and experiential dimensions are central to sustainable character formation in Islamic education (Fahrudin & Malik, 2025).

One of the most significant findings concerns the role of collective artistic labor in shaping cooperation and social solidarity. The collaborative nature of *Panggung Gembira* required students to negotiate responsibilities, coordinate across divisions, and prioritize collective success over individual interests. This finding aligns with studies on performing arts education showing that artistic collaboration strengthens empathy, mutual dependence, and social awareness among participants (Dhony et al., 2025; Basri et al., 2025). However, this study contributes a novel Islamic educational perspective by demonstrating that collaboration within *pesantren* performing arts is framed not only as teamwork but also as *ta’awun* (mutual assistance) rooted in Islamic ethics.

Another important contribution of this study lies in its analysis of conflict management as part of Islamic character formation. Existing studies on *pesantren* education often portray Islamic boarding schools as harmonious and discipline-oriented institutions. Yet the findings of this research reveal that conflict, disagreement, emotional tension, and negotiation are integral parts of students’ educational experiences. Rather than suppressing conflict, *Panggung Gembira* transforms conflict into a reflective pedagogical process through guidance, mediation, and collective evaluation. This finding is particularly important because it challenges overly romanticized representations of *pesantren* culture by showing that moral maturity is formed through negotiating social tensions rather than avoiding them. The ability of students to regulate emotions, compromise, and maintain collective unity reflects what contemporary scholars describe as relational character education, where morality develops through interpersonal interaction and ethical negotiation within communal life (Laili et al., 2026).

The findings further demonstrate that creativity in *pesantren* education should not be interpreted as unrestricted artistic freedom detached from religious norms. Instead, creativity in *Panggung Gembira* emerged through continuous negotiation between innovation, institutional values, Islamic ethics, and collective expectations. This finding challenges the binary assumption that religious education restricts artistic creativity. On the contrary, the *pesantren* environment facilitated what may be described as “ethical creativity,” in which artistic innovation is guided by moral responsibility and spiritual consciousness. This supports recent studies indicating that Islamic educational institutions increasingly integrate creativity and 21st-century skills without abandoning religious identity (Fahrudin & Malik, 2025).

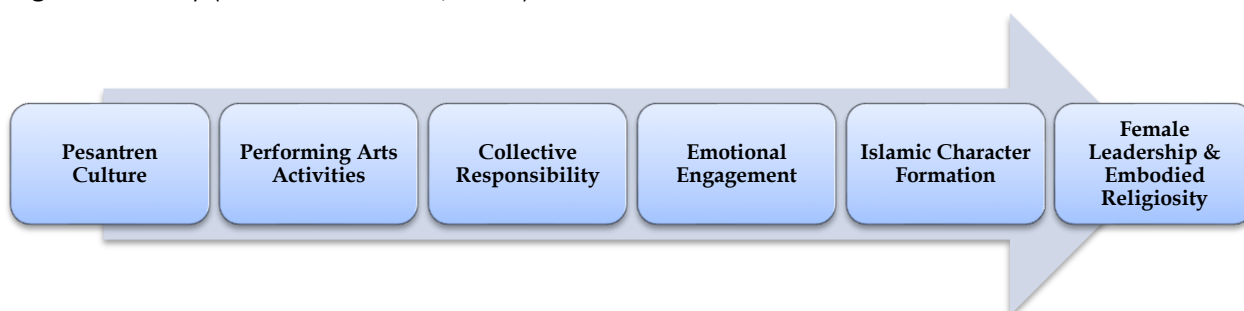


Figure 3. Educational Ecosystem of *Panggung Gembira*

From a gender perspective, this study also offers an important contribution to contemporary discussions on female agency in Islamic education (see Figure 3). Most existing studies on *pesantren* leadership and organizational culture remain heavily male-centered or focus primarily on kyai authority structures. In contrast, this research highlights how female students actively construct leadership, independence, decision-making capacity, and public responsibility through performing arts activities. The sixth-grade female students were not passive recipients of moral instruction; they acted as organizers, leaders, negotiators, creators, and decision-makers throughout the preparation process. This finding indicates that *pesantren* performing arts can function as a transformative space for strengthening female Muslim subjectivity, leadership capacity, and social confidence within an Islamic educational framework.

Furthermore, this study introduces the concept of performative religiosity in *pesantren* education. The religious dimension of *Panggung Gembira* was not expressed primarily through doctrinal preaching, but through disciplined artistic conduct, collective responsibility, sincerity, humility, emotional restraint, and ethical interaction during the creative process. Islamic values became visible through embodied action rather than verbal instruction alone. This finding extends previous research on religious arts education by demonstrating that spirituality in performing arts may operate implicitly through practice, atmosphere, and institutional culture rather than explicitly through symbolic religious content (Suryadi, 2022; Munier et al., 2024).

Another novelty of this study lies in its phenomenological approach. Previous research on character education in *pesantren* generally employed normative, policy-oriented, or descriptive frameworks emphasizing institutional effectiveness. In contrast, this study foregrounds students' lived experiences, emotions, struggles, anxieties, negotiations, and self-reflections throughout the artistic process. By using phenomenology, this research reveals that character formation is deeply experiential, emotional, and relational. The findings therefore contribute methodologically to Islamic education studies by demonstrating the importance of phenomenological inquiry in uncovering how students subjectively experience moral formation processes within *pesantren* culture.

This study positions *Panggung Gembira* as a multidimensional educational ecosystem integrating performing arts, hidden curriculum, Islamic ethics, collective discipline, emotional learning, and female leadership development. The study contributes theoretically by expanding discussions on embodied Islamic character education; empirically by highlighting performing arts as a pedagogical mechanism in *pesantren*; and methodologically by applying phenomenological analysis to Islamic educational practice. These findings suggest that future Islamic education models should move beyond cognitive moral instruction toward more experiential, participatory, and culturally embedded approaches capable of integrating spirituality, creativity, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Panggung Gembira* at Pondok Pesantren Modern Darussalam Gontor for Girls Campus 1 functions as an effective model of embodied Islamic character education, where moral values are internalized through artistic practice, organizational responsibility, social interaction, and reflective experience. The phenomenological findings reveal that character formation occurs not merely through formal religious instruction but through active participation in performing arts activities that cultivate cooperation, leadership, creativity, self-management, conflict resolution, independence, responsibility, and self-evaluation. These experiences enable students to embody Islamic values cognitively, emotionally, socially, and behaviorally within the

pesantren environment. The study contributes to the discourse on embodied learning, hidden curriculum, and experiential Islamic education by demonstrating that performing arts can serve as a transformative pedagogical space for integrating spirituality, creativity, emotional development, and moral formation. Consequently, Islamic educational institutions may consider arts-based learning as a strategic approach to fostering holistic character development while maintaining strong alignment with Islamic educational values and traditions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to *Pondok Pesantren* Modern Darussalam Gontor for Girls Campus 1 for granting permission and support throughout the research process. Special appreciation is extended to the teachers, mentors, and sixth-grade female students involved in *Panggung Gembira* for their openness, cooperation, and valuable insights during interviews, observations, and documentation activities.

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