

THE IMPACT OF SENIORITY CULTURE AND SENIOR SANTRI BEHAVIOR ON DISCIPLINE AND MORAL CHARACTER IN PESANTREN

Muh Zaki Maulana¹; Misbahul Arifin²; Ahmad Sahidah³; Samira Agoro⁴

^{1,2,3}Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

⁴National Institute of Educational Sciences, Nigeria

¹Correspondence Email: arifinmisbahul324@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the influence of seniors' behavior on discipline, learning motivation, and moral character of students at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The main focus of this study is to analyze the interaction patterns of seniority in the daily life of students and their impact on the character development of younger students. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Informants consisted of foster guardians, pesantren administrators, and older and younger students. The results showed that the behavior of seniors who tended to be authoritarian and intimidating contributed to a decrease in discipline, learning motivation, and weakened the moral values of younger students. Although there are positive interactions, the frequency is very small compared to repressive interactions. This finding indicates that the culture of seniority that is applied excessively actually hinders the character education process in pesantren. The implications of this study emphasize the need to reformulate pesantren policies related to the pattern of relations between students with a more humanist and educational approach in order to create a coaching climate conducive to the moral and spiritual development of students.

Keywords: *Pesantren Seniority; Santri Discipline; Learning Motivation; Character Education*

A. Introduction

Pesantren education in Indonesia has long been recognized as one of the main pillars in shaping the character and morality of the younger generation of Muslims (Hanafi et al., 2023). As an educational institution rooted in Islamic values, pesantren not only teaches religious sciences but also emphasizes the importance of discipline, independence, and noble character (Ramadhani et al., 2025). The communal environment and intense social interaction among the santri are key factors in the formation process. However, despite this noble goal, the social reality in pesantren often leaves complex dynamics, one of which is the culture of seniority. This phenomenon, which naturally arises in the hierarchical structure of pesantren, is often a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it can foster a sense of responsibility and leadership in senior santri, but on the other hand, it has the potential to create unhealthy relationships and negatively impact the development of junior santri.

A culture of excessive seniority in pesantren, where senior santri have poorly managed authority over junior santri, can lead to a series of problems (Karim & Ashoumi, 2025). Senior behavior that tends to be dominant, even intimidating, can hamper the motivation of junior santri to learn,



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trigger a decrease in discipline, and most crucially, erode the formation of morals, which should be the main foundation of pesantren education (Utama & Salim, 2024). Junior students who are victims of bullying or psychological pressure from their seniors are at risk of experiencing decreased self-confidence, difficulty adapting, and even mental health problems (Putri et al., 2025). Therefore, it is important to deeply examine how the dynamics of seniority in pesantren, especially in Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, which is famous for its strict traditions, affect the character building, discipline, and learning motivation of santri. This research becomes relevant because it seeks to not only identify problems, but also provide empirical insights that can be used for the improvement of the pesantren education system holistically.

Although pesantren education has a central role in shaping santri morals, the reality in the field shows that the culture of seniority is often a significant obstacle (Jalalussayuthy & Murcahyanto, 2024). Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, as one of the leading Islamic educational institutions, has a disciplined and structured education system. However, behind the formal structure, informal interactions between senior and junior santri are often colored by excessive seniority practices. The main problem that becomes the focus of this research is how the practice of excessive seniority in Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid significantly affects the discipline, learning motivation, and moral formation of junior santri.

This problem is crucial because the impact of this seniority practice can damage the essence of pesantren education itself. Instead of producing noble, disciplined, and highly motivated santri, the negative practice of seniority has the potential to create an environment full of fear, reduce mutual respect, and ultimately, inhibit positive character building. In Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, this phenomenon can be seen in the form of senior domination in daily activities, giving tasks outside of authority, and psychological pressure that can have an impact on the academic performance and psychology of junior students. Therefore, this research will dig deeper into how these impacts materialize and measure how much influence they have on students.

Research on the influence of social dynamics in educational environments, especially pesantren, has been widely conducted. Previous studies provide an important foundation for understanding this issue, but also point to research gaps. Chaniago et al. (2021) in the journal "The Relationship between Senior Santri and Junior Santri: An Ethnographic Study at Pesantren X", this study found that senior-junior relationships in pesantren are not always negative. Relationships built on the basis of guidance and mentorship can actually strengthen a sense of brotherhood and responsibility. However, this study also noted that the practice of authoritarian seniority tends to trigger conflict and reduce the participation of junior santri in pesantren activities (Fauzi et al., 2025). This study focuses on relationship dynamics in general and does not specifically measure the impact on discipline, motivation, and morals.

Furthermore, Hidayat, et al. (2022) in the article "Bullying Behavior of Seniors and its Impact on the Psychological Condition of Santri", this study used a quantitative approach and showed a positive correlation between bullying behavior by seniors and symptoms of stress and anxiety in junior santri. This study argues that excessive seniority is a form of bullying that can have a serious impact on mental health (Sylvia, 2025). However, this research has not specifically explored the impact on aspects of formal discipline and santri morals in daily social interactions, and focuses more on individual psychological impacts.

Finally, research by Wulandari and Syafi'i (2020) in the journal "The Influence of Social Environment on Santri Learning Motivation in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools", This article highlights how the social environment, including interactions with peers and seniors, has a significant influence on learning motivation. It was found that social support from seniors can increase motivation, while pressure from seniors can decrease learning enthusiasm and academic achievement (Mariam, 2025). Although relevant, this research is general and does not present an in-depth analysis of the specific mechanisms by which seniority affects discipline and moral formation.

Based on the above literature review, there is a significant research gap. Previous studies tend to focus on psychological impacts or social dynamics in general, but no research has comprehensively and integratively examined how specific seniority behavior (not just general bullying) at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid affects three key variables simultaneously: discipline (formal and informal), learning motivation, and moral formation. Previous studies have not specifically examined how the distinctive seniority culture in a particular pesantren can be a decisive variable in the character education process. This gap is the basis for this research to conduct a more in-depth and contextual exploration.

The phenomenon of seniority in Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School represents a unique social dynamic, where senior santri hold strategic positions and social authority that is not written in formal regulations, but has a strong influence in daily practice. On the one hand, this relationship pattern can function as a means of positive coaching, such as academic assistance and strengthening discipline; but on the other hand, it has the potential to cause pressure on junior santri through excessive assignments, harsh reprimands, or the application of informal rules that are not fully aligned with official pesantren policies. This tension between the coaching role and the potential for abuse of authority raises important issues because it has direct implications for learning motivation, compliance with rules, and the process of internalizing moral values. This complexity emphasizes the urgency of a study that not only portrays symptoms but also traces the socio-cultural roots behind them.

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic and specific approach to analyzing the influence of seniority culture in Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. This research not only identifies the existence of seniority problems but also deeply examines their causal mechanisms and impacts.

1. **Integration of Key Variables:** The main novelty lies in the integration of three key variables, namely discipline, learning motivation, and morals, in response to one main variable, namely excessive seniority behavior. Previous studies tend to separate these variables, while this study will present them as an interrelated whole in the context of pesantren.
2. **Contextual Focus at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School:** Every pesantren has a unique culture and tradition. The novelty of this research is to analyze specifically the context of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, which has a strict tradition, so that the findings produced will be very contextual and can provide sharper recommendations for the institution.
3. **Impact Mechanism Analysis:** This research will explore not only "whether" seniority has an impact, but also "how" the impact occurs. Through a qualitative approach, this research will explore the narratives and experiences of santri, so as to provide a more complete picture of the psychological and social mechanisms that occur. For example, how fear of seniors affects compliance (discipline), which is pseudo, not from self-awareness.

In general, this study aims to examine in depth the impact of seniority behavior on discipline, learning motivation, and the formation of santri morals. The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To analyze in depth how the culture of seniority at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid affects the level of discipline of junior santri, both in the context of compliance with formal rules and social norms.
2. To explore the impact of senior behavior on junior santri's learning motivation, particularly in relation to the passion for academic achievement and active participation in learning activities.
3. To identify how the culture of seniority contributes to the formation or erosion of santri morals, such as empathy, mutual respect, and honesty in daily social interactions.

Thus, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of seniority culture in pesantren and offer practical recommendations for creating an educational environment that is more conducive to the holistic development of santri character.

B. Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the behavior of seniors at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid and its impact on the discipline, learning motivation, and morals of students (Emilia Kurniawati & Sulastri Rini Rindrayani, 2025). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena, exploring the meaning behind seniority interactions, and understanding their implications in the context of pesantren education (Rohani, 2024). The research location was centered at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, which is located at street KH Zaini Mun'im, Karanganyar, Paiton, Probolinggo, from May to July 2025, coinciding with the active period of learning and coaching activities of the santri.

Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024), while data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, including data reduction, data presentation (data display), and conclusion drawing or data verification (Puspa, 2025). This process was carried out repeatedly and simultaneously from the initial stage of data collection to the preparation of the research report, thus enabling researchers to capture the dynamics of the phenomenon comprehensively and contextually.

The selection of informants in this study was based on their ability to provide comprehensive insights into the dynamics of seniority and its impact (Zahra et al., 2024). The main sources of information include foster parents and pesantren administrators, who have an institutional understanding of pesantren policies and culture, as well as senior and junior santri who directly experience and are involved in seniority interactions. The involvement of these various perspectives is important to build a rich understanding and triangulate the data, ensuring the validity of the findings. This methodological justification confirms the study's commitment to academic rigor in capturing the nuances of behavior and perceptions that shape social reality in pesantren, thus enabling other scholars to understand, replicate, or build on this study.

The data collection process began with direct observation of the daily activities of santri, interactions between seniors and juniors, and the application of rules and norms in the pesantren environment, in order to empirically understand the context of seniority behavior. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with key informants to obtain their personal narratives, views, and experiences related to seniority, discipline, motivation, and morals. Documentation, such as pesantren regulations, activity records, and related archives, was also collected to complement and verify the information obtained from observations and interviews. Once the data were collected, the data reduction stage involved filtering, coding, and categorizing relevant information. The reduced data was then presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic tables to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships between variables. The final stage, data verification, involved reviewing findings with informants and comparisons between data sources, as well as the application of content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretation analysis to explore the deep meaning of the data, resulting in conclusions that are robust and scientifically justifiable.

C. Results and Discussion

The discussion of the results and discussion is presented in detail in the following section, which includes several sub-discussions.

1. Results

a) Correlation of Big Brother Behavior with Santri Discipline

The results of interviews, observations, and documentation at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid show a strong correlation between the behavior of seniors and the level of discipline of students, especially among younger students. Ustad Moh Hafidul Ahkam, one of the foster guardians, stated that "many younger students become lazy to participate in mandatory activities because they are afraid or feel uncomfortable with the treatment of their seniors." This statement indicates that authoritarian behavior from seniors affects the discipline attitude of students in undergoing daily routines at the

pesantren (Kurniawan et al., 2019). The same thing was expressed by one of the pesantren administrators, Ustad Moh Taufik Hidayat, M.Pd. emphasized that, "When the older siblings are too demanding, the younger siblings find ways to avoid responsibility."

Observation data reinforces these findings. During the monitoring of afternoon activities, researchers found that some junior santri chose to remain in their rooms when the cleaning activities began, even though the schedule had been announced. Documentation in the form of photos of activities also shows that the ranks of junior santri are often incomplete in routine activities, especially in sectors supervised by seniors who are known to be strict.

This phenomenon shows that intimidative behavior results in a decrease in the participation and discipline of junior santri in participating in routine activities (Ernawati, 2018). The culture of seniority, which should be directed at coaching, becomes a tool of oppressive control, disrupting the mechanism of character building based on awareness and exemplary. Paulo Freire's concept of humanistic education, which rejects authoritarian systems and prioritizes dialogue, is relevant to see the weaknesses of this interaction pattern (Mahur et al., 2019).

Table 1. Correlation of seniors' behavior with santri discipline

Informant	Interview Excerpt	Interpretation of Findings
Foster guardian	"Students are afraid to leave their rooms because seniors often yell at them."	Older siblings' behavior causes a decrease in discipline and reluctance to participate in activities.
Pesantren Management	"We see a tendency for younger siblings to avoid activities due to pressure from older siblings."	The culture of seniority disrupts the structure of discipline that should be coaching in nature.
Junior Santri	"When there are seniors, I often pretend to be sick so that I don't get ordered around."	Passive resistance as an escape from social pressure
Observation	Many junior santri are absent from certain sector cleaning schedules.	Formal discipline is disrupted due to social pressure from seniors
Documentation	Photos of the activity show an incomplete line of junior students in sectors supervised by senior students.	Low attendance under harsh senior supervision

In Table 1, it can be seen that the authoritarian and intimidating behavior of seniors directly reduces the formal and informal discipline of junior santri, which triggers reluctance to participate in pesantren activities.

b) The Effect of Seniors' Behavior on Learning Motivation

Students' learning motivation is significantly influenced by the quality of their interpersonal relationships with seniors (Aminudin, 2019). Foster guardian, Ustad Mazidurrahman said, "There were children who were initially diligent in reciting the Koran, but after being yelled at by their seniors several times, their enthusiasm decreased." This shows that negative emotional responses due to seniority interactions have a direct impact on willingness to learn (Lestari et al., 2025). A student named Faradisa Indana Zulfa revealed, "I want to be diligent, but I am afraid of being wrong in front of seniors who like to insinuate." On the other hand, Ustadzah Nur Diana Kholidah said that "santri motivation will drop when they feel the learning environment is not psychologically safe."

The three quotes show that learning motivation does not only depend on internal factors of the santri, but is greatly affected by the social climate formed through relationships between santri, especially in the hierarchical structure of seniority (Basri et al., 2025). A repressive environment creates an atmosphere of emotional insecurity, which ultimately inhibits the learning process (Samadi et al., 2023).

Observations in the study room show that santri who are in groups with supportive older siblings tend to be more active in asking questions, while groups led by authoritarian older siblings are more passive. Documentation in the form of attendance records in learning activities shows a decrease in participation in groups that often receive harsh reprimands. This finding is in line with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan) which emphasizes that security and social support are important prerequisites for intrinsic motivation. Repressive environments hinder the achievement of these conditions (Tnopo et al., 2025).

Table 2. The influence of seniors' behavior on learning motivation

Informant	Interview Excerpt	Interpretation of findings
Foster guardian	"My foster child often loses enthusiasm after being scolded by older siblings."	Abusive behavior decreases learning motivation.
Pesantren administrator	"Students become apathetic because they are afraid of making mistakes in front of seniors."	A repressive learning environment inhibits self-confidence
Junior Santri	"I prefer to study alone at night, when not supervised by seniors."	Motivation to learn arises when social pressure is absent
Observation	Groups with supportive senior supervision are more active in discussions.	Positive relationships trigger learning motivation
Documentation	Attendance records show a decline in the group that received frequent reprimands.	Verbal pressure reduces learning participation.

Table 2 shows that the quality of interpersonal relationships within the seniority structure affects learning motivation; supportive behavior encourages participation, while verbal pressure reduces enthusiasm and confidence.

c) The impact of seniors' behavior on morals and social relationships

The interaction between seniors and juniors has a real impact on the formation of morals and social relationships of students (Wahid & Prasetya, 2024). The administrator, Ustadzah Abir Nabila mentioned, "We found that some of the conflicts that occur stem from tensions between seniors who feel powerful and younger siblings who feel intimidated." Junior student, Madinatul Munawaroh, also said, "I find it difficult to respect seniors who like to yell, even though I know I should be polite." In the interview with the foster guardian, Ustadzah Maria Faradela said, "We often hear children mocking each other because they follow the older siblings' rude style of speaking."

These three quotes show that the bad behavior of older siblings not only reduces the quality of interactions but is also contagious as unhealthy communication and behavior patterns (Ernita et al., 2024). The character education process that should be the main pillar of pesantren becomes distorted by seniority practices that emphasize dominance over exemplary (Rizqi, 2021).

Observations of daily activities show that the loud speaking style of older siblings is often imitated by younger siblings in peer interactions. Documentation in the form of transcripts of violations of the rules shows an increase in cases of ridicule and fighting among junior santri, most of whom imitate the communication style of seniors. This shows that senior behavior that does not reflect *uswah hasanah* (exemplary) has the potential to distort the objectives of *tarbiyah islamiyah*, which emphasizes moral education through positive examples.

Table 3. The impact of seniors' behavior on morals and social relationships

Informant	Interview Excerpt	Interpretation of Findings
Pesantren administrator	"Conflicts between students are often initiated by harsh treatment from seniors."	Social relations become tense due to dominant patterns
Foster caregivers	"Children imitate the angry ways of their seniors in joking with their friends."	The santri's morals have declined due to imitating violent behavior
Junior Santri	"I respect the ustadz more than my seniors because they don't yell at me."	Value disorientation in respectful relationships
Observation	The loud speaking style of seniors is imitated by juniors in peer interactions.	Transmission of negative communication patterns
Documentation	Transcripts of offenses show an increase in cases of taunting and fighting.	Senior behavior affects junior social dynamics.

Table 3 confirms that negative interactions not only have an impact on tense social relationships, but also spread into harsh communication patterns that reduce the moral quality of santri. Overall, these findings indicate that the culture of seniority in pesantren has a significant and simultaneous influence on discipline, learning motivation, and moral formation, both through the mechanism of positive role models and the transmission of negative behavior.

d) Interaction Patterns and Their Impact

In addition to interviews, the results of three months of observation of inter-class interactions in the pesantren environment reinforced the findings regarding the influence of seniority culture. In the observations, researchers found that harsh directives and intimidating behavior appeared more often in daily interactions (Rachmawati, 2024). For example, the researcher noted that in the afternoon cleaning session, seniors often ordered in a high tone, which discouraged some of the younger students from attending. In one session, a santri was seen crying after being scolded for arranging his shoes incorrectly.

However, there are also positive interactions. In the gotong royong activity to welcome the commemoration of Islamic holidays, the cooperation between seniors and juniors can be seen running smoothly and full of jokes. This kind of interaction proves that the potential for healthy relationships exists, as long as they are developed in a non-dominative context. Unfortunately, the frequency of these positive interactions is much lower than the negative ones.

The behavior of seniors at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid can lead to two main patterns of interaction, namely negative and positive. Negative interactions characterized by harsh and domineering communication are more likely to produce pseudo-discipline because they are based on fear, reduce learning motivation due to a psychologically unsafe atmosphere, and weaken moral quality through the transmission of harsh communication patterns.

Conversely, positive interactions characterized by supportive, polite, and exemplary attitudes are actually able to foster discipline born of awareness, increase learning motivation because students feel valued, and form noble morals in accordance with the values of tarbiyah islamiyah. Thus, the interaction pattern of older siblings is an important factor in shaping a healthy pesantren education climate that is in line with the vision of Islamic character development.

2. Discussion

The results of this study provide a deep understanding that the culture of seniority in Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School has a strong correlation with the decline in discipline and the deterioration of the moral character of santri. The dominant culture of seniority, characterized by authoritarian behavior, orders outside of authority, and excessive control from senior students, creates a social climate that tends to be repressive. This situation fosters pseudo-discipline, where

junior santri obey the rules not because of value awareness, but because of fear of consequences from seniors. This condition is in line with the findings of Chaniago et al. (2021) who underline that rigid social hierarchies in boarding-based education can trigger conflict, reduce participation, and hinder authentic character building (Wahyuni & Suparto, 2025).

This study reinforces these findings with qualitative evidence from interviews and observations, which show that psychological pressure due to senior bullying not only impacts the emotional aspects but also affects the daily behavior of santri. As found by Hidayat et al. (2022), bullying practices such as orders beyond authority and verbal dominance trigger stress and anxiety (Yuliani & Suhana, 2022). This study broadens the perspective by linking such stress to a decline in the quality of social interactions, weakened solidarity, and reduced moral commitment. Thus, the impact of seniority culture does not stop at the psychological dimension, but also spreads to the realm of ethics and discipline, eroding the values of tarbiyah islamiyah, which is the foundation of pesantren education (Afharrozi, 2024).

Nevertheless, this finding also found the positive side of the relationship between seniors and juniors, especially in the context of tutoring and social support. This is in line with Wulandari and Syafi'i's (2020) research, which confirms that the role of seniors can be a catalyst for increased motivation and moral formation if carried out within the framework of mentorship (Santri & Astriani, 2024). However, in Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, this supportive behavior only appears sporadically, dominated by repressive seniority practices. This phenomenon indicates a gap between the ideal potential of seniority as a means of character building and the reality of its practice, which emphasizes power (Mawardani et al., 2024).

Overall, the results of this study lead to the conclusion that an uncontrolled seniority culture is actually a determining variable that hinders the achievement of discipline based on value awareness and damages the formation of the moral character of santri. Pesantren, as educational institutions rooted in Islamic values, need to redirect the culture of seniority to a pattern of interaction based on example, guidance, and brotherhood in order to create an environment conducive to moral development and true discipline.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the culture of seniority at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid has a complex and predominantly negative impact on the discipline, learning motivation, and morals of junior santri. The most important finding of this study is the gap between the ideal purpose of seniority as an educational tool and the reality of its practice, which often turns into a form of domination and intimidation. The lesson learned is that discipline imposed through fear will not form a solid character. Instead, it erodes intrinsic motivation and undermines social relationships, which are the main foundations of character education in Islam. Therefore, the wisdom of this research is the importance of reflecting on and reforming seniority practices to be more oriented towards humanistic guidance and mentorship, rather than power.

Scientifically, this research makes a significant contribution by updating the perspective on social dynamics in pesantren. Instead of seeing seniority as a single phenomenon, this study examines the interaction of three key variables, namely discipline, motivation, and morals as a response to seniority practices, which has not been done in many previous studies. Nevertheless, this research has limitations because it focuses on a single case study at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, so its findings may not be widely generalizable. Further research is needed to accommodate other pesantren. In addition, the use of survey methods in future research will provide a more comprehensive quantitative picture, allowing comparisons between pesantren and providing a solid basis for formulating more appropriate and targeted policies in the context of pesantren education as a whole.

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