

Negotiating Tradition and Modernity: The Pedagogy of Mahabbah in Developing the Character of Millennial Students at the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School in Jombang

**Sandi Ferdy Yulianto^{1*}, Ahmad Barizi², Sufirmansyah³, Ninik Zuroidah⁴,
Muhammad 'Imaduddin Roshief⁵**

^{1,3,4} Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia

² Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

⁵Yarmouk University, Yordania

*Email : sandyferdy03@gmail.com

Abstract

The shift in educational values in the digital era has added further strains between the traditional authoritarian pedagogy and the reflective and egalitarian nature of millennial learners. This research will explore the role of mahabbah pedagogy as an affective–relational process of negotiating this tension during character education in pesantren. The research contribution is that it conceptualizes mahabbah pedagogy as an affective-relational pedagogical framework and provide empirical evidence of its role in mediating the relationship between tradition and modernity in Islamic education. This research is a qualitative study that relies on an intrinsic case study design that is conducted at Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School, Jombang. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to collect data by way of participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with kiai, ustaz, and santri, and documentation. Inductive data analysis was done using data reduction, displaying data and drawing conclusions. The results indicate that mahabbah pedagogy is reflected in the affective relationships that are empathetic, emotionally close, and trustful, which create a dialogical and reflective learning environment. It acts as a relational process of cultural mediation and the mitigation of tensions between hierarchical traditions and egalitarian learner attributes. Moreover, it encourages transformative reflection by the methods of self-knowledge and internalization of values. The study presents three fundamental elements, namely, affective relationships, cultural mediation, and transformative reflection, that conglomerate to create the wholeness of character development of santri. Finally, mahabbah pedagogy presents a theoretically based and practically applicable model in the development of humanistic, adaptive and transformative education, and in providing a platform upon which future integration can be achieved within digitally mediated learning environments.

Keywords : Mahabbah Pedagogy, Tradition–Modernity Negotiation, Islamic Boarding School, Millennial Students Character, Affective–Relational Pedagogy



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INTRODUCTION

Transformations on a global scale related to digitization, accelerated circulation of information, and changes in value systems are factors that have influenced the nature of millennials, who have become more reflective and critical, as well as do not accept traditional authority unconditionally (Smith, 2025). In relation to education, such processes contribute to a shift in paradigms from authoritative teaching practices towards approaches that are dialogical, participative, and based on emotionality. Compared to the process of knowledge transmission, millennials are more susceptible to educational approaches that are focused on

empathy, connectivity, and personal relevance (Ghita-Pirnuta & Cismaru, 2022; Skidmore, 2006; Teo, 2019). Thus, traditional education institutions, among which there are also Islamic boarding schools, face a dilemma regarding the preservation of authenticity and adaptation to modern conditions.

Islamic boarding schools or pesantrens, which are institutions of Islamic learning, have a very strategic place in forming the religious nature of the new generation in Indonesia. Yet, pesantren no longer operates in a homogenous social environment (Sofi et al., 2025; Taufikin, 2025). The nature of the millennial santri is open-minded, equal, and aware of digital culture. On the other hand, pesantren still holds onto its traditional format, which involves the kiai's authority, hierarchical relations, and ta'dzim value (Rosowulan et al., 2025). Hence, there arises an area for negotiation of tradition versus modernity, a process that is sometimes problematic especially when it comes to everyday pedagogical processes.

This assertion is also backed up by the empirical evidence obtained nationally about significant difficulties that exist in terms of social interactions in the educational context. In a study conducted by the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI), it is reported that there were 573 acts of violence in educational institutions during 2024, which is twice the figure reported in the preceding year (JPPI, 2024). Of these, some 20 percent are said to take place in Islamic boarding schools where the form of violence may involve sexual violence (42 percent), bullying (31 percent), and physical and psychological violence (Hasibuan, 2026; Mahmud et al., 2025).

In pedagogic practice, this situation suggests the presence of a problem in the affective aspect of education. The interaction of teachers and learners remains largely structural and authoritarian and has therefore not been able to produce any level of empathy or emotional intimacy (Wang et al., 2024; Zainudin, 2025). This is where the idea of negotiating tradition with modernity comes into play. The traditional pesantren system based on obedience can neither be completely rejected nor can it remain static in view of the dynamic personality of millennial students (Jubba et al., 2022; Sofi et al., 2025).

The concept of mahabbah pedagogy is seen to emerge as an educational philosophy centered on love, empathy, and compassion. In terms of its relation to modern pedagogy, the mahabbah pedagogy can be said to be connected to affective pedagogy—developed through educational research by Megan Boler—and reflective pedagogy, which are informed by the concepts of affective and critical reflection, respectively (Greene & Boler, 2004; Mezirow, 1991). The mahabbah pedagogy philosophy, therefore, can be considered to relate directly to Carl Rogers' theory of humanistic education and the ethics of care theory by Nel Noddings, which place empathy and compassion as essential principles of deep and meaningful educational processes (Bergman, 2004; de Lima, 2018; Noddings, 1984; Yulianto et al., 2024). In the Islamic tradition, mahabbah is based on profound theological and philosophical reasoning, according to Al-Ghazali, who saw love as the way toward morality and purification of the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), and also Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, who considered mahabbah the foundation of the

spirituality connection between humankind and God, affecting compassionate social relations. Besides, Ibn Miskawayh's ethical theory (*tahdzib al-akhlaq*) highlights that character development happens not only as a consequence of rational thinking but also due to affection and moral virtue development (Al-Ghazali, 2002; Abitolkha & Muvid, 2021; Candra et al., 2021; Moosa, 2024). In this regard, the pedagogy of mahabbah could be viewed as an integration of Islamic theological beliefs (mahabbah and rahmah) and an empathy-based educational methodology in terms of Islamic boarding schools as a tool of cultural negotiation between tradition and authority and the need for modernity, which presupposes dialogic relations and humanism.

However, numerous studies have demonstrated considerable advancements regarding pedagogical aspects of Islamic education, yet one cannot ignore the existing gap related to the affective aspect of love. According to research conducted by Ni'mah et al. (2023) studies in Islamic pedagogy mainly focus on normative and structural aspects and do not touch upon the issue of relations based on compassion. As stated by Mustaghfiroh et al. affective literacy should be included into the process of studying Islamic pedagogy; however, at present, its implementation is limited to theoretical considerations. Moreover, according to Fahrudin et al. (2026) a love-based approach in education may contribute to character development and religious moderation; however, in its turn, it is applied mainly from a curriculum perspective rather than an aspect of educational relationship. In addition, research performed by Listiana et al. (2025) revealed that a curriculum change related to the inclusion of the concept of love in Islamic education may foster emotional, moral, and social development of students; however, once again, this study was limited to changes made to curricula and not pedagogical relationships. Moreover, research conducted by Judijanto and Arwen (2025) states that global perspectives of Islamic pedagogy are related to the integration of religious beliefs into modern systems, while the affective.

Moreover, these previous studies have not specifically considered how the concept of mahabbah is practiced as a form of relational education in the pesantren setting, especially in dealing with the conflict of the hierarchical structure and its reflection-oriented counterpart among millennial students. Hence, there was no consideration for the process of cultural negotiation that occurs between tradition and modernity in the educational realm. The result is that relatively few studies have been conducted on mahabbah pedagogy as a way of resolving the problem mentioned above, which makes the topic under discussion urgent and important for exploration.

The present research will adopt a qualitative method in the implementation of the study where an intrinsic case study strategy will be employed. In particular, the study will explore pedagogy practices within the framework of mahabbah pedagogy practices at the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. In gathering data, participant observation, in-depth interview, and documentation of the educational activities will be used. Based on preliminary findings, it is noted that there are attempts at reforming pedagogical relations

from the authoritarian type into dialogue and humanistic types. Interaction between the kiai and santri is not only instructional in nature; it is accompanied by emotional attachment through personal counselling, persuasion, and violence-free techniques. Nevertheless, the hierarchy of the pesantren still exists, leading to negotiations between tradition and modernity in relation to the santri.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the practice of mahabbah pedagogy as a mechanism for negotiating between tradition and modernity in developing the character of millennial students at the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. The focus of the study includes the forms of implementation of mahabbah pedagogy, the dynamics of educational relationships, and its contribution to the character development of students. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of affect-based Islamic pedagogy as well as practical contributions to formulating a pesantren education model that is more humanistic and relevant to the challenges of the times.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using an intrinsic case study design as developed by Robert E. Stake (1995), grounded in an interpretive-constructivist paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, experiences, and dynamics of educational relationships within the practice of mahabbah pedagogy in the pesantren setting. The method was adopted because it is ideal for the study of the phenomenon in its totality within its natural environment where there is no separation between the phenomenon and the environment. The study was carried out at the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School in Jombang between January and April 2026 with the researcher acting as the main source of information gathering and analysis.

The respondents for the study comprised the kiai, ustaz, and the millennial santri who were participating in the education process. The informants were chosen based on the following conditions: involvement in the education process, experience in intense interaction within the learning process, and willingness to provide information. Snowball sampling was used to find more informants that could help in enriching the data gathered. In collecting the data, the researcher observed the informants during their daily activities, conducted semi-structured interviews to gather the meaning and experiences of the informants regarding the subject, and documented their participation in the education process.

In carrying out the data analysis process, the researchers adopted an inductive approach following the interactive approach by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (2014), which involves three processes of data reduction, data display, and drawing of conclusions/verifications. In the analysis, the researchers started with open coding to establish codes or themes, after which they categorized the data and identified themes based on pedagogical relationships according to mahabbah principles. Data validity was ensured by

adopting measures such as source and method triangulation, member checking, and audit trail in order to enhance the reliability, consistency, and validity of the research results.

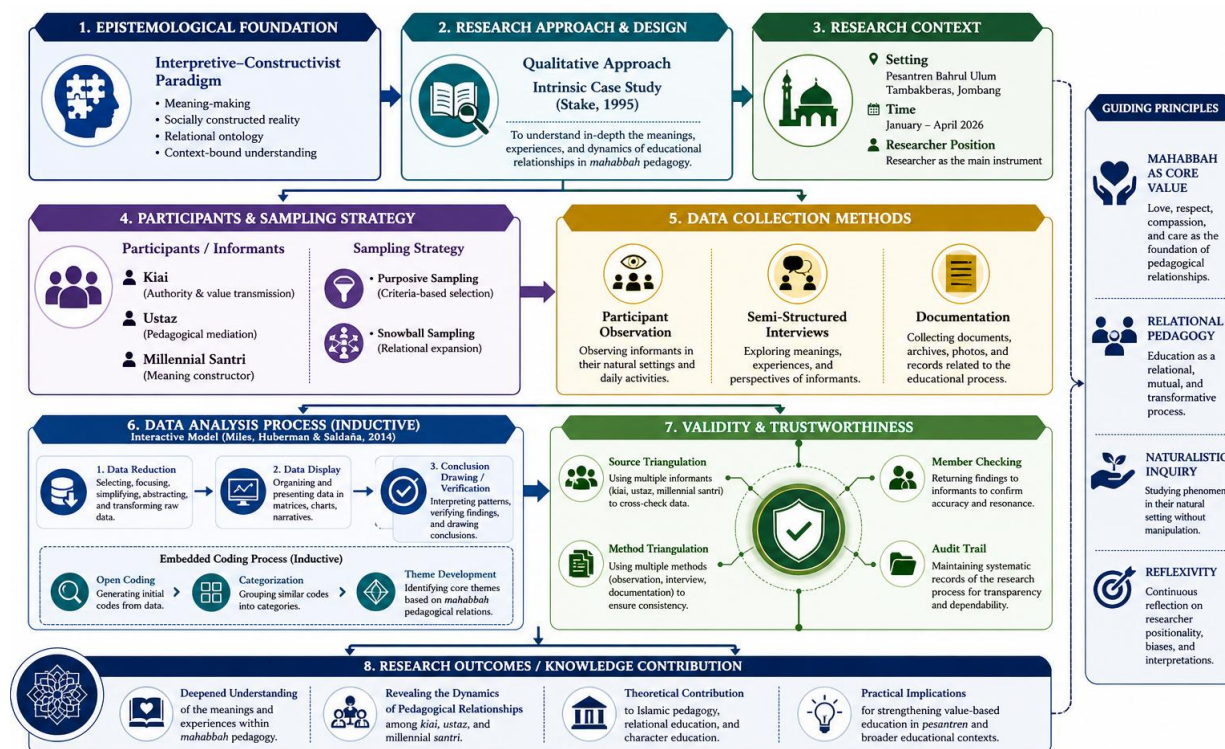


Figure 1. Research Design and Methodological Framework

This figure represents the overall research design, including the interpretive constructivist paradigm, qualitative intrinsic case study approach, participant selection, data collection methods, inductive data analysis process, and strategies to ensure the validity and trustworthiness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Mahabbah Pedagogical Practices in Islamic Boarding Schools

From the research findings, it appears that the pedagogy of mahabbah can be said to be expressed mainly through relational proximity, empathic communication and personal engagement between kiai, ustaz, and santri. Notably, these forms of interactions occur not just within the context of the actual learning sessions but even during informal daily interactions like during religious practices, meals and discussions. Within the relational space provided here, the kiai is not just treated as an authoritative figure but as someone who ensures emotional security and stability. Such a relation promotes dialogic and participative engagements, hence creating reflective environments for learning.

It also emerges from the observations that mahabbah pedagogy finds expression in the use of a communicational style marked by persuasion, peace and non-coercion. The manner in which guidance is provided does not focus on control but self-awareness, emotions and

management of feelings among the students. It is also clear from the observations that violation of rules or errors is dealt with using reflection rather than punitive measures. This helps the students become aware of themselves emotionally. This shows that the emotional element is central in the entire educational process.

Also, the pedagogy of mahabbah is exercised through exemplary practices (*uswah*), with kiai and ustaz always setting the example so that values like compassion, sincerity, and tolerance are taught through example. In this way, learners internalize values not only at the cognitive level, but also through the life experience, imitation, habituation. To reinforce this, the spiritual practices, which include collective prayers and religious discussions, enhance the affective and reflective aspects of learning and make the learning process more personal and spiritual.

This finding supports the theory of affective pedagogy which assumes that "the central role of emotion in authentic learning experiences" (Boler & Zembylas, 2016; Walker & Palacios, 2016). The strong reliance on empathy and affective closeness is in accord with Carl Roger's humanistic education which posits the necessity of emotionally safe learning environments, and with Nel Noddings' ethic of care, which assumes that "caring relationships are basic to education" (Chen & Shih, 2025; Krikorian, 2022).

Furthermore, the finding supports affective-reflective pedagogy which posits that "making meaning develops out of the confluence of the affect and the reflection" (Calleja, 2014; Karakou & Karalis, 2024). It is through the infusion of spiritual practices that pedagogic interactions simultaneously enhance the affective involvement and the critical reflection and transformation of individual learners.

Nevertheless, compared to other research in affective pedagogy, this study situates affective pedagogy within an integrated Islamic boarding school that combines the affective, social and spiritual dimensions concurrently. In the previous affective pedagogy studies, affective pedagogy is mostly discussed within a secular teaching and learning environment. The current findings reveal that the affective experience in Islamic boarding schools is deeply connected with religious rituals, collective living and role models. And the focus on habituation and lived experience is similar to the thought of the classic Islamic scholars Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh who believe in the combination of ethical practices, affective cultivation and rational development for character building (Alhaib & Alsandi, 2022; Topkara, 2022).

All these arguments imply the idea that the mahabbah pedagogy is supposed to be regarded in dualism, i.e. as a synthesis of the affective and relational pedagogies where the role of affection, integrity and spirituality is paramount in the learning process. Historically, emotions have been considered as a secondary aspect of cognitive processes. In this regard, the emphasis within such pedagogy is laid on affective processes being the foundation for cognition, existence and development.

Regarding the theoretical perspective, the present study can be used to give the further insight into the problem of affective pedagogy, emphasizing its significance in the framework of religion-based education and learning through emotional involvement in the spiritual and relational context. At the empirical level, this research shows that the role of formal curriculum activities in building pedagogy in pesantren is not significant as compared to quality of teacher-student relationships and peer relationships. Thus, it can be proposed that mahabbah pedagogy can be incorporated into the whole educational paradigm to address contemporary challenges.

In conclusion, the pedagogy of mahabbah in the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic boarding school is not merely an assumed cultural practice but rather a formal affective pedagogy which allows the development of humanistic and transformative relationships. Relationship closeness, compassionate communication, role modeling and spiritual practices lead to an affective learning space, which allows emotional participation, self-awareness and character development. Therefore, pedagogy of mahabbah has offered a valuable contribution to the sphere of affective pedagogy in Islamic education and is a useful application to the present day classroom.

Dynamics of Negotiation Between Tradition and Modernity

It suggests that the educational practice of Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School embodies a dynamic negotiation of the traditional authority based culture and the shifting cultural values of modernity. In traditional pesantren structure, the kiai is an authoritative symbol and intellectual guru in a system of respecting elders and authority. Nevertheless, the emerging of the millennial santri which shaped by digital culture and the flows of global information introduces new dispositions of critical, reflexive, dialogical and multi-perspectival stances.

The interaction is not shown in an openly confrontational style but embedded in the ongoing subtle negotiation process occurring in students' daily learning lives. The pedagogical relations shift gradually from a pattern of domination toward interactive and dialogical patterns. The kiai and ustaz were adaptable by creating discussion forums, responding to students' questions, and leaving spaces for interpretation within the framework of pesantren values, by which authority becomes more inclusive and relational rather than de-energized. Beside that, the students have been able to incorporate digital technology to their learning and religious experiences, while the pesantren are selectively appropriating digital technology into the school system and managing it within pesantren values. It points at selective assimilation where modernity is not fully accepted nor denied.

This research is consistent with previous works which describe the adaptive character of pesantren toward the transformation of socio-cultural change and modernity challenges (Aini et al., 2025; Huda, 2024; Rochim et al., 2025). Especially the principle of *al-muhafadhah 'ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdu bi al-jadid al-ashlah*-to conserve the good things in the tradition

and to maintain the beneficial things in modernity-has been commonly identified as the guideline for the pesantren reforms.

This research contributes beyond the previous work because it suggests that the negotiation of modernity with tradition is not just structural or institutional but primarily relational and affectual. While other works focus on curriculum and institutional reform, the result in this study shows that the transformation and negotiation of the tradition with modernity can also be observed through classroom interaction (especially authority and communication patterns). The shift from authoritative into dialogical interaction supports other research which advocates that the needs of modern students is a room for interaction, critical discourse and sense-making. In this context, the research emphasizes that this dialogical activity is provided within a value-based religious paradigm.

The means of relations and love is the key to the sustainability of pesantren education in a modern environment as a means of managing and reframing tradition, instead of merely rejecting change. The transformation of power to a hierarchical-only form to an authority that finds its strength in relationships of trust, interaction and emotion is what can be termed as relational authority; that is, authority that derives its power through relationships of trust, interaction and emotion.

Mahabbah pedagogy is one of the significant mediational mechanisms in this negotiation such that no resistance is encountered. By instilling empathy, affection and care among teachers and students, it creates the proper space and condition for dialogue, where the meaning of tradition can be conveyed through contexts. Considering the viewpoint of affective pedagogy, emotion is the key factor that makes it possible to be ready to change, whereas in the perspective of Mezirow, transformational learning, dialogue and reflective experience are the factors that provide the grounds to make a change in individual perspective (Boler & Zembylas, 2016; Calleja, 2014; Walker & Palacios, 2016).

Negotiations between tradition and modernity then should not be perceived as the conflict between the two poles but as a continuous reinterpretation that is propelled by relational practices. This means that the process of educational change in pesantren must not only be accomplished structurally, but that it is also closely related to quality of relationships.

To sum up, the interplay between tradition and modernity in Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School is carried out through a dialogical, selective, and affective negotiation. Tradition is reinterpreted rather than abandoned due to the changing circumstances, whereas modernity is selectively appropriated and not uncritically welcomed. In the middle of this, mahabbah pedagogy functions as an affective-relational link connecting two seemingly conflicting entities, continuity and transformation. The result contributes theoretically to affective-relational pedagogy's value as a useful framework in navigating cultural dichotomy and preserving the modernity of traditional-based educational institutions.

The Pedagogy of Love as a Relational Mechanism for Overcoming Conflict

The results indicate that the introduction of the mahabbah pedagogy is a relational mechanism that is effective in overcoming the potential conflict based on the encounter of the tradition authority and the modern students tendencies. Rather than developing resistance to teaching values and teaching provided by the kiai and ustaz, the closeness of the classroom relationship, the empathy shown towards the santri and the close attention that is given to the individual make them accept the command of their instructor. In this sense, authority is not only based on structural or hierarchical power, but rather has been internalized by identification with the authority and deep personal and emotional association with the authority.

Such mechanism could be observed in an empirical basis in the fact that the declining student resistance towards traditional authority is observable because they accept that their teacher are not only the agents of control and authority, but also that they are caregivers who do not neglect the well-being of students. This relational approach assists in the shifting of the form of authority of the authoritative and controlling form towards persuasive one that leads to voluntary participation of the santri in the process of teaching and learning. In this way, the authority has been rendered as legitimate as it is because of its design but also because of the sense of empathy and humanity.

Moreover, mahabbah pedagogy is used as a mediator in the establishment of a sense of trust as the basis of educational relationships. A trust allows a more symmetrical communication whereby the santri become active participants in the process of learning and, thus, they no longer be passive recipients. Other than cultivating a sense of trust when relating to other persons, it can also create a reflective process that helps santri towards having knowledge about themselves. Santri can be more facilitated with the help of the experiences to construct their actions and beliefs to achieve self-understanding.

These results are parallel to the caring ethics framework presented by Nel Noddings which argues that caring relationships can have significant contributions toward student engagement and meaningful learning (Chen & Shih, 2025; Noddings, 2002). Similarly, the prominence of empathy and interpersonal connection reflects Rogers' humanistic theory that supports the contribution of relational settings toward human development and learning (Krikorian, 2022; Swan et al., 2020).

Also, the emergence of reflection identified in this study echoes Mezirow's transformative learning theory which defines perspective transformation in terms of critical reflection about one's experiences (Calleja, 2014; Jones, 2020; Tural & Beaktaş Çetinkaya, 2025). In this study, beyond Mezirow's theory, reflection in pesantren goes beyond the cognitive level to connect and intertwined with emotions and spirit.

Contrary to prior research that tends to view authority in the classroom as formal, structural, or institutional authority, the current findings reveal the significance of emotional

legitimacy in the existence of authority. Therefore, authority is conceptualized less as formal authority but as what can be termed as relational authority—one which stems from mutual trust, empathy, and close interaction with students over time (Hastasari et al., 2022).

Broadly, the results can be summed up as highlighting the efficacy of the mahabbah pedagogical model in functioning as a relational integrative system which, at the same time, can help to build trust, reduce anxiety, and provide a deep level of transformational learning. The emotional engagement combined with reflection is the strength of this method as students will experience and embrace values without being compelled and unwilling to take part.

Academically, this study contributes to the body of literature on affective-relational pedagogy by providing an integrated perspective on relationships, emotions and reflection as critical elements to facilitate change in the classroom. The study shows that conflict in an educational environment—especially those resulting from generational or cultural conflict—is not simply to be managed through regulation or reform of structure alone, but it can be dealt with by fostering significant relationships.

The study points out the importance of good relationships in the capacity of a pesantren to cope with the modern world. The mahabbah pedagogical system provides a system of reconciling tradition and modernity.

These findings can then suggest a conceptualization of mahabbah pedagogy as a process of relationality supported by three interwoven mechanisms of (1) building trust as the foundation of educational interaction, (2) mediating tension through the process of empathetically and dialogically engagement, and (3) promoting transformative consciousness through critical reflection practice. These three dimensions work interactively to build up the entire pedagogical model which is both adaptive and transformative.

Overall, the present study found that mahabbah pedagogy is a relational and transformative strategy that renegotiates the relationship of managing tension and conflict in pesantren education. This research finds that the reliance on emotional legitimacy rather than coercion in pedagogical authority and the process of establishing trust, empathy, and reflection into learning can contribute to a better way of balancing change with tradition within pesantren contexts. This finding supports the idea of affective-relational pedagogy as an efficacious approach toward solving cultural conflicts and promoting transformational learning in value-based education contexts.

The Impact of Mahabbah Pedagogy on the Character Development of Millennial Students

The results indicate that the mahabbah pedagogy has a powerful influence on the formation of the millennial santri character in the sphere of the affective, social and spiritual. The establishment of an empathy-caring-closely feeling atmosphere of learning builds a conducive psychologically learning atmosphere. The learning atmosphere of this study is that

which learning not only the acquisition of knowledge but the internalization of the values, attitudes and disposition which becomes the shape of the characters of santri. It is therefore evident that mahabbah pedagogy is a powerful means of value internalization, through emotional involvement.

One of the effects of mahabbah pedagogy which significantly apparent is to promote empathy and social consciousness. The continuous exposure to caring relationship will enhance the empathy of santri towards other people and open-minded to accept diversity; and also increase the capacity of santri to maintain socially related environment that generate co-operative interaction and collectivist values in everyday life.

Moreover, it assists in changing the attitude of ta'dzim as a formulaic and compliance attitude to a reflective and authentic awareness. Santana treats the teacher with respect out of inner rapport and not because of fear and compulsion. This change symbolizes the process of outside imposed discipline to the inner-driven consciousness and moral awareness.

It further suggests that mahabbah pedagogy helps in increasing self awareness and self responsibility of santri. Through dialogical and reflective practice, they are then able to interpret their experiences, evaluate their action and self regulate themselves in most situations. The possession of this characteristic makes santri a person who is able to make an independent and responsible decision.

Lastly, an additional significant factor is in the field of emotional maturity. It instils in the students the capacity to control their emotions positively by focusing on caring-compassive and non-violent communication at the learning environment. This level of emotional maturity will be a major factor to millennial students in the social world with its changeability and complexity.

Such findings are aligned with the ethics of care approach suggested by Nel Noddings, claiming that caring relationship develops sensitivity to others and responsibility in students (Chen & Shih, 2025; Noddings, 2002). Similarly, highlighting of safe learning atmosphere fits in Carl Rogers' humanistic theory that empathy and genuineness can enable personal growth and self-responsibility (de Lima, 2018; Krikorian, 2022; Swan et al., 2020).

The self-awareness obtained in the current research also corresponds to Mezirow's concept of transformative learning which states that critical reflection toward the experience allows transformation in one's perspective (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020; Jones, 2020; Karakou & Karalis, 2024). However, the research can make its own contribution since reflective processes in pesantren is not only intellectual but also is accompanied by emotional and spiritual sides.

Moreover, the findings are consistent with the data on the emotional intelligence literature that highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in character development and flexibility problems (Feraco et al., 2023; Ghita-Pirnutu & Cismaru, 2022; Oktaviani et al., 2020).

Its role in different learning environments is also acknowledged by other research studies (Parker et al., 2009; Purushottamashtikar & Manoharan, 2024; Zaprukhan et al., 2025) However, what is special about this very study is that it is able to show how emotional intelligence is developed in terms of relational and experiential aspects that manifest themselves in everyday educational life.

The findings is also in parallel with other studies of emotional intelligence in relation to character education and ability to cope with, but yet, it offers a new perspective for that emotional intelligence in pesantren is developed through daily, relationship-centered activities instead of programmed training activities.

These findings imply that mahabbah pedagogy can be viewed as a comprehensive system of character education where emotive response, relational engagement and reflective processing function as integral systems for growth. Character development occurs not just through normative teaching, but also through lived, real world experiences that touch the emotional, relational, and spiritual lives of students.

From a theoretical stance, this study further supports the proposition that the affective dimension is a crucial dimension of the process of change, both within existing models of affect pedagogy, as well as expanding on these to encompass faith-based pedagogy. It proves that affective and relational dynamics are not ancillary to learning but foundational to fostering ethical sensibility, self-regulation and social responsiveness.

From a practical perspective, these findings may present a case for how institutions of learning-particularly the tradition-based institution- may adapt and remain relevant in today's post-modern world by foregrounding relationality and affection. Mahabbah pedagogy provides a method whereby tradition can be internalized in relevant ways for modern students.

These findings can be described in a way that the effects of mahabbah pedagogy in character development are four interconnected components; (1) empathy capacity that increase social and relational sensitivity, (2) reflective consciousness that internalize the values and self-understanding, (3) personal responsibility that responsible for autonomous ethical action, and (4) emotional maturity that increase adaptability and toughness. These components are working together in integrated model of character formation.

Overall, this study demonstrated that mahabbah pedagogy implemented at Bahrul Ulum Islamic Boarding School Tambakberas has significant contribution to the millennial students character formation holistically. Character formation can be achieved through the integration of empathy, reflection, trust, and emotional bonding, not merely adherence on normative behaviors, but deeper ethical awareness, and individual change. This study indicates that even the mahabbah pedagogy has rooted in traditional values, but it is relevant in the context of contemporary teaching and learning as well since it nurtures the emotional sensitive, socially responsible, and adaptable students, as the solution of the tension between the past traditions and the global modernity.

Towards a Pedagogy of Mahabbah as an Affectively Relational Pedagogy

The results of this paper present mahabbah pedagogy, not only as an education practice based on values, but also as a theoretically-grounded pedagogical framework, which contributes to the development of the modern educational theory, especially, in the sphere of affective pedagogy. In contrast to dominant pedagogical models that assume that cognitive aspects of learning are a key precondition to meaningful learning processes, mahabbah pedagogy posits that affective relationships are central precondition of meaningful learning activities. In this regard, the research builds on the outlook of affective pedagogy, by showing how emotional engagement is not only supportive, but formative in defining educational encounters and results.

The present work also adds to the existing literature by incorporating the main concepts of both Western and Islamic educational traditions into an overall pedagogical framework. In the Western sense, it is based on humanistic education, ethics of care, and transformative learning, especially the focus on empathy, relational engagement, and reflection. It takes the concept of mahabbah of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh, which emphasize the role of moral, emotional and spiritual aspects in shaping characters.

This integrative practice leads to a pedagogical model which cuts across the dichotomy of secular and religious education. Instead of considering these traditions as disjointed, the study shows that they are compatible and complementary to each other, especially in highlighting the centrality of relationships, emotional engagement, and moral development in education. In turn, mahabbah pedagogy can be interpreted as an affective-relational approach based on theological values and yet being relevant to the contemporary educational discourse.

According to the results, this paper suggests a conceptual model of mahabbah pedagogy that comprises three components interconnected with each other:

1. Affective Relationship

This aspect includes empathy, emotional intimacy and trust as the basis of pedagogical interaction. It stresses that the purposeful learning develops out of relational proximity between teachers and students.

2. Cultural Mediation

This aspect is a negotiating mechanism of the tension between tradition and modernity through dialogical and humanistic interaction. It allows redefining the values in reacting to the changing sociocultural environments.

3. Transformative Reflection

This dimension helps to build self-awareness and perspective change using reflective practices that combine emotional, cognitive and spiritual experiences.

These three elements work together in a synergistic relationship to achieve a pedagogical system that is not only instructional but transformative as well. The model emphasizes that

education effectiveness is closely correlated with the quality of interpersonal relationships and system's ability to adapt to its sociocultural environment.

The main theoretical implication of the present study is the development of mahabbah pedagogy as an affective-relational pedagogical model that could help eliminate the dichotomy between the traditional and modern approach to the process of education. Although traditional and modern education focus on different aspects, mahabbah pedagogy combines these aspects by means of relationship engagement based on empathy and trust.

In this respect, mahabbah pedagogy can be conceptualized as an epistemological bridge connecting continuity and change, allowing tradition to be relevant within the contemporary contexts. This observation implies that educational change need not be done solely by structural or curricular change, but may also be accomplished through the transformation of relational dynamics in the learning process.

Besides its practical contribution to the education of pesantren, this study will provide a conceptual model which can be utilized in a wider scope within the education setting. Mahabbah pedagogy shows that incorporation of emotion, relationship and reflection is necessary in developing educational systems that are humanizing, adaptive and transformative.

Moreover, this paper demonstrates that more scholarly research is required to focus on the affective aspects of learning, especially in the conditions of globalization and quick social transformation. It also recommends future research to further explore the applicability of affective-relational pedagogy in various educational contexts and cultural backgrounds.

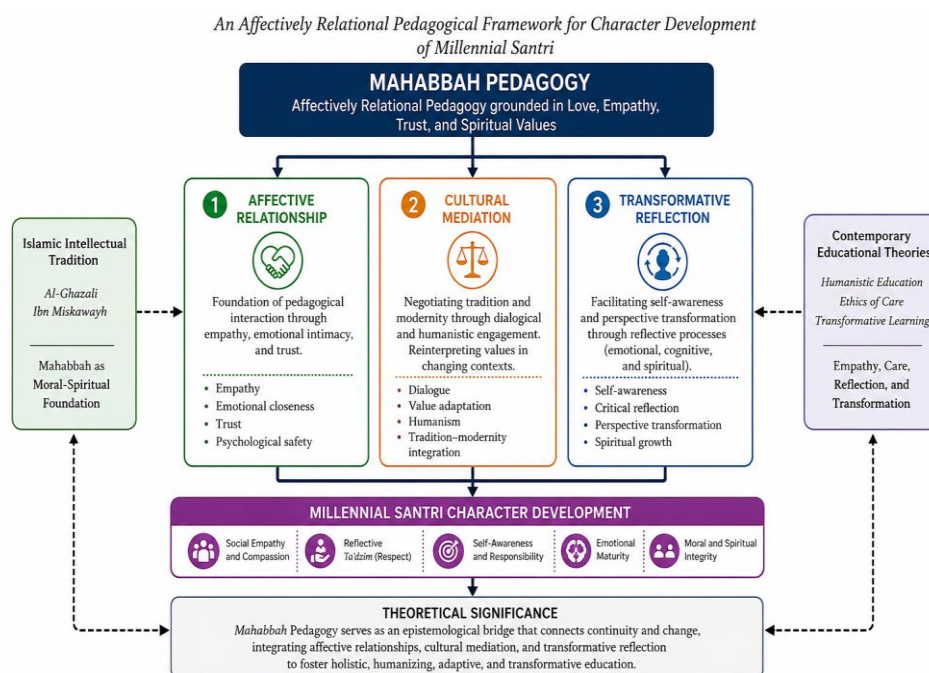


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Mahabbah Pedagogy

The figure above is an example of the affective-relational pedagogical framework that was created during this research study, demonstrating the operation of the Mahabbah Pedagogy through three interconnected levels that impact the formation of character among the millennial santri, namely affective relations, cultural mediation, and transformative reflection.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that mahabbah pedagogy as practiced in Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School in Jombang is an affective-relational approach towards fostering the character development of millennial santri within the context of modernity. The results point to the fact that educational relationships that are based on love, empathy, and emotional proximity provide a dialogical and reflective learning environment that makes it easier to internalize values. This relational process allows the mahabbah pedagogy to not only strengthen the dimensions of key character traits (such as empathy, self-awareness, responsibility and emotional maturity) but also to help facilitate constructive negotiation between the traditional pesantren authority and the reflective disposition of the contemporary learner.

In theory, the study contributes to the development of the mahabbah pedagogy as an affective-relational pedagogical model where relationships, emotions and reflection are the main processes of learning. The expression of this contribution is the conceptual model which comprises three related dimensions: the affective relationships, cultural mediation, and transformative reflection. The model offers a new dimension by making pedagogy a system of relations that allows bridging the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, thus extending the existing discussions on affective pedagogy into the context of Islamic education. These results confirm that educational change cannot be unilaterally determined by structural or curricular reformation, but is a fundamental form of restructuring of the quality of the relational dynamics in the learning process.

Nevertheless, this study can be limited in that it is based on a single context of a pesantren and it relies on the use of a qualitative case study approach that may limit the generalization. It is thus advised that future studies should be conducted to determine the generalizability of the mahabbah pedagogy in various academic contexts and cultural backgrounds as well as to utilize quantitative or mixed-method designs to prove and correct the given model. Additional research can also be conducted to explore its application to digital learning contexts, as well as adopt longitudinal designs to determine its long-term effectiveness in character development. In general, this research adds to the new knowledge by offering a theoretically-grounded and practically-relevant framework to develop humanizing, adaptive and transformative education in Islamic as well as a broader educational context.

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