RESEARCH ARTICLE

Islamic Calligraphy Learning as a Medium for Developing Disciplinary and Creative Character in *Pesantren*-Based Education

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Abstract

Character education is a fundamental aspect of Islamic education, particularly in *pesantren*-based institutions that emphasize moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. This study aims to examine the role of Islamic calligraphy learning (*khat*) in shaping disciplinary and creative character among female students (*santriwati*) at Pondok *Pesantren* Modern Putri Darur Ridwan, Banyuwangi. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of learning activities and students' calligraphic works. The findings reveal that Islamic calligraphy learning is implemented through structured stages, including preparation, demonstration, guided practice, independent practice, and evaluation. These stages effectively foster disciplinary character, manifested in punctuality, adherence to rules, patience, accuracy, and responsibility. At the same time, calligraphy learning nurtures creative character by encouraging students to explore decorative elements, composition, and artistic expression within established writing conventions. The study also highlights the significant role of teachers as role models and facilitators, as well as the supportive *pesantren* environment in reinforcing character formation. The results indicate that discipline and creativity develop synergistically rather than contradictorily through calligraphy learning. This study concludes that Islamic calligraphy can serve as an effective medium for character-based education in Islamic boarding schools, integrating religious values, artistic learning, and character development holistically.

Key words: Islamic Calligraphy, Character Education, Discipline, Creativity, *Pesantren* Education.

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly within Islamic educational institutions that aim to integrate cognitive, affective, and moral development. In the Indonesian context, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) have long been recognized as institutions that play a strategic role in shaping students' moral character, discipline, and creativity through both formal and non-formal learning processes (Haedari et al., 2004; Wahid, 1999). The emphasis on character formation is aligned with the National Education System of Indonesia, which explicitly states that education functions to develop learners' potential in order to become individuals who are faithful, morally upright, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible citizens (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia No. 20 Tahun 2003).

Within Islamic education, learning is not merely understood as the transmission of knowledge, but as a holistic process that integrates spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. One form of learning that embodies this holistic approach is the teaching of *khat* or Islamic calligraphy. Islamic calligraphy is not only an artistic discipline, but also a medium for internalizing religious values, cultivating aesthetic sensitivity, and fostering personal virtues such as patience, discipline, perseverance, and creativity (Sirojudin AR, 2014; Afifi, 2002). Historically, calligraphy has occupied a central position in Islamic civilization, serving as a visual expression of the Qur'an and as a medium for preserving and transmitting religious knowledge (Akbar, 1995).

The importance of writing and literacy in Islam is firmly rooted in the Qur'anic revelation. The first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad emphasized reading and writing as fundamental instruments of knowledge and guidance (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2014). Furthermore, the Qur'an explicitly mentions the pen (*qalam*) as a symbol of divine instruction and human learning, highlighting the sacred nature of writing in Islamic tradition. This theological foundation positions calligraphy not merely as an artistic skill, but as an act of devotion and reflection that connects learners to divine values (Syaharudin, 2001). Consequently, learning Islamic calligraphy has the potential to contribute significantly to character formation, particularly in shaping disciplined behavior and creative expression.

Discipline and creativity are two essential character traits that are increasingly emphasized in modern education. Discipline refers to obedience, consistency, responsibility, and adherence to rules, which are crucial for personal development and academic success (Surakhmad, 2012). Creativity, on the other hand, involves the ability to generate original ideas, explore alternative solutions, and express oneself in innovative ways (Munandar, 2004). While these two traits may appear contradictory, educational practices demonstrate that discipline can provide a structural foundation that supports the development of creativity. In the context of Islamic calligraphy, discipline is manifested through strict adherence to rules of proportion, letter formation, and writing techniques, while creativity emerges through decorative variations, composition, and artistic interpretation.

Several scholars argue that arts-based learning plays an important role in character education. Artistic activities require concentration, emotional control, persistence, and self-reflection, which collectively contribute to moral and personal

development (Sagala, 2013). In Islamic calligraphy learning, students are trained to write Arabic letters with precision, balance, and harmony, following established aesthetic rules. This process demands patience, accuracy, and self-discipline, as even minor mistakes can affect the overall quality of the work (Afifi, 1989). At the same time, students are encouraged to explore creative designs, ornamentation, and visual composition, allowing them to express individuality within the boundaries of established norms.

Pesantren-based education provides a unique environment for the integration of character education and artistic learning. The daily routines of *pesantren* life emphasize discipline, obedience, respect, and spiritual devotion, creating a supportive context for character formation (Haedari et al., 2004). Learning activities are not confined to classrooms but extend to daily practices, role modeling by teachers (*ustadz*), and institutional culture. In this environment, Islamic calligraphy learning becomes part of a broader educational ecosystem that reinforces moral values and behavioral norms.

Despite the recognized potential of Islamic calligraphy learning, empirical studies that specifically examine its role in character formation remain limited. Previous research has often focused on the technical aspects of calligraphy or its contribution to language skills, particularly Arabic writing proficiency (Nuha, 2012). Other studies have explored character education through religious instruction or counseling programs, but few have examined how artistic-religious learning such as calligraphy contributes to the development of discipline and creativity among students. This gap in the literature highlights the need for qualitative research that explores how calligraphy learning is implemented and how it influences students' character within the *pesantren* context.

This study is situated at Pondok *Pesantren* Modern Putri Darur Ridwan Parangharjo Songgon Banyuwangi, an Islamic boarding school that has integrated Islamic calligraphy as a regular learning activity since its establishment. The institution provides a relevant case for examining the role of calligraphy learning in shaping students' character, particularly among female students (*santriwati*). The *pesantren* emphasizes not only mastery of calligraphic techniques but also the internalization of values embedded in the writing of Qur'anic verses, hadiths, and moral aphorisms. Such practices are believed to foster reflective thinking, spiritual awareness, and positive character traits.

The focus of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to explore how Islamic calligraphy learning contributes to the formation of disciplinary character among *santriwati*. Discipline in this context includes punctuality, adherence to learning procedures, carefulness in writing, and responsibility in completing tasks. Second, the study examines how calligraphy learning fosters creative character, as reflected in students' ability to design calligraphic compositions, apply decorative elements, and express artistic originality. Understanding these processes is essential for developing effective character-based learning models in Islamic educational institutions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws upon concepts of character education, arts-based learning, and Islamic pedagogy. Character is understood as a set of moral and behavioral qualities formed through the internalization of values and sustained educational experiences (Akh, 2012; Fitri, 2012). Learning is viewed as an

interactive process involving educators, learners, and learning resources within a structured environment (Hamalik, 2001). Islamic calligraphy, as both an art and a religious practice, provides a meaningful context for integrating these theoretical dimensions.

By examining Islamic calligraphy learning within a *pesantren* setting, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on character education in Islamic schools. The findings are expected to provide insights into how artistic-religious learning can serve as an effective medium for character formation, particularly in cultivating discipline and creativity. Moreover, the study seeks to offer practical implications for educators and policymakers in designing character-based curricula that integrate cultural and religious heritage into contemporary educational practices.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design, aiming to explore in depth the process of Islamic calligraphy (*khat*) learning and its role in shaping students' character, particularly discipline and creativity. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the focus of the study was not on measuring variables numerically, but on understanding meanings, experiences, behaviors, and educational processes as they naturally occur within a specific social and cultural context (Moleong, 2010; Kasiram, 2011).

Descriptive qualitative research allows researchers to systematically describe phenomena based on factual data obtained from the field, while maintaining sensitivity to context and participants' perspectives. In this study, the descriptive design was used to portray how Islamic calligraphy learning is implemented in the *pesantren* environment and how this learning process contributes to the formation of disciplinary and creative character among *santriwati*.

The research was conducted at Pondok *Pesantren* Modern Putri Darur Ridwan, located in Parangharjo Village, Songgon District, Banyuwangi Regency, Indonesia. This *pesantren* was selected as the research site due to its long-standing integration of Islamic calligraphy as a regular learning activity and its explicit educational orientation toward character formation. The institution has implemented calligraphy learning since its establishment and continues to develop students' artistic and moral competencies through structured instructional practices.

The *pesantren* environment provided a relevant and meaningful context for this study, as daily life is regulated by disciplined routines, religious practices, and educational activities that collectively support character education (Haedari et al., 2004). Moreover, the presence of a dedicated calligraphy instructor and institutional support for artistic expression made the *pesantren* an appropriate setting for examining the relationship between calligraphy learning and character development.

The participants in this study consisted of Islamic calligraphy teachers and female students (*santriwati*) who were actively involved in calligraphy learning activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research objectives and their direct involvement in the learning process. The calligraphy teacher was selected as a key informant due to his role in designing, implementing, and evaluating learning activities. The *santriwati* participants were chosen from different class levels to capture diverse experiences and perspectives regarding discipline and creativity in calligraphy learning. This sampling

technique enabled the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth data that reflected the actual learning practices and character formation processes.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation, which are commonly used in qualitative educational research to ensure comprehensive data gathering (Usman, 2006; Moleong, 2010). Observation was conducted to examine directly how Islamic calligraphy learning was implemented in classroom settings. The researcher observed teaching methods, student participation, classroom discipline, time management, writing practices, and creative activities. Observations focused on identifying behaviors related to discipline, such as punctuality, adherence to instructions, neatness, and responsibility, as well as indicators of creativity, including originality of design, variation in decoration, and artistic expression. Besides, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the calligraphy teacher and selected *santriwati*. The interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding the learning process and its influence on character formation. Open-ended questions allowed participants to express their views freely while maintaining focus on the research objectives. Interviews provided deeper insights into internal factors, such as motivation and awareness, as well as external factors, such as instructional strategies and institutional culture, that influence discipline and creativity (Akh, 2012). Next, documentation was used to support and validate data obtained through observation and interviews. Documents included lesson plans, students' calligraphy works, photographs of learning activities, institutional regulations, and other relevant records. These documents provided tangible evidence of learning practices and students' creative outputs, enabling the researcher to triangulate findings and enhance data credibility.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive qualitative analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Moleong, 2010). Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from field notes, interview transcripts, and documents. Relevant data related to discipline and creativity were categorized and coded thematically. Moreover, data display involved organizing reduced data into narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Lastly, conclusion drawing and verification involved identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings within the data, while continuously comparing findings with existing theories and previous studies to ensure analytical rigor.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applied triangulation of sources and techniques. Data obtained from observations were cross-checked with interview results and documentation to confirm consistency and accuracy (Kasiram, 2011). Prolonged engagement in the research setting and persistent observation were also employed to enhance data credibility. Additionally, peer debriefing and reflective analysis were conducted to minimize researcher bias and ensure that interpretations were grounded in empirical evidence rather than subjective assumptions.

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to

protect participants' identities. The research was conducted with respect for institutional norms and cultural values of the *pesantren* environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Islamic Calligraphy Learning Implementation

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic calligraphy (*khat*) learning at Pondok *Pesantren* Modern Putri Darur Ridwan is implemented as a structured, routine, and value-oriented learning activity. Calligraphy learning is conducted regularly according to the *pesantren*'s academic schedule and is integrated into the broader educational framework that emphasizes character formation alongside cognitive and technical skill development. This implementation reflects the *pesantren*'s commitment to balancing religious, artistic, and moral education, as emphasized in Islamic pedagogy (Hamalik, 2001; Sagala, 2013).

Based on classroom observations, the learning process generally follows several stages: preparation, demonstration, guided practice, independent practice, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, students are required to prepare learning tools such as calligraphy pens, ink, rulers, and worksheets. This stage already reflects disciplinary values, as students are trained to arrive on time, prepare equipment independently, and maintain cleanliness and order in the classroom.

Figure 1. Classroom setting of Islamic calligraphy learning

During the demonstration stage, the teacher explains the theoretical foundations of calligraphy, including letter proportions, writing rules, and stylistic conventions. This explanation is often accompanied by direct demonstrations on the board or paper. According to the teacher, mastering the rules of *khat* is essential before students are allowed to explore creative variations:

> *"Calligraphy cannot be done carelessly. Students must first understand the rules and proportions. Discipline in writing is the foundation before creativity can emerge."*
>
> (Interview with Calligraphy Teacher)

This statement reinforces the idea that discipline functions as a prerequisite for creativity, rather than as a constraint. The guided and independent practice stages allow students to apply these rules while gradually developing personal styles within established boundaries.

One of the main findings of this study is that Islamic calligraphy learning plays a significant role in shaping the disciplinary character of *santriwati*. Discipline is manifested in several observable behaviors, including punctuality, adherence to instructions, accuracy in writing, perseverance, and responsibility for assigned tasks. Observational data revealed that *santriwati* consistently demonstrated punctuality and compliance with classroom rules during calligraphy lessons. Students were expected to attend class on time, bring complete equipment, and follow learning procedures carefully. Failure to meet these expectations resulted in corrective feedback rather than punitive measures, emphasizing self-awareness and responsibility.

A student participant explained:

> *"If we come late or forget our tools, we cannot start practicing immediately. This makes us realize that discipline is important, especially in calligraphy, because every step depends on preparation."*
> (Interview with Santriwati)

This finding aligns with Surakhmad's (2012) assertion that discipline is cultivated through consistent routines and clear expectations. The *pesantren* environment further reinforces these behaviors through daily schedules and institutional norms, creating continuity between classroom learning and everyday life.

Another important aspect of disciplinary character formation is accuracy in writing. Islamic calligraphy requires precise strokes, balanced proportions, and careful spacing. Students were observed repeatedly erasing and rewriting letters to achieve correctness, demonstrating patience and perseverance.

The teacher emphasized that mistakes are an integral part of learning, but they must be addressed with persistence:

> *"Calligraphy teaches patience. Students cannot rush. If one line is wrong, they must correct it carefully. This process trains them to be disciplined and calm."*
> (Interview with Calligraphy Teacher)

This practice resonates with Afifi's (2002) view that calligraphy learning cultivates habits such as orderliness, patience, and meticulousness. Discipline here is not enforced through external control alone, but gradually internalized through repetitive practice and self-correction.

Internal and External Factors Influencing Disciplinary Character

The findings indicate that disciplinary character formation through calligraphy learning is influenced by both internal and external factors.

Internal factors include students' motivation, interest, and personal awareness. Some *santriwati* expressed intrinsic motivation to excel in calligraphy due to personal interest or spiritual appreciation of Qur'anic texts. This motivation encouraged them to practice diligently and accept corrections positively.

> *"Writing verses of the Qur'an makes me feel calm. I want my writing to be good, so I try harder and become more careful."* (Interview with Santriwati)

This supports Akh's (2012) argument that character development is more effective when learners internalize values through meaningful experiences. External factors include the teacher's role modeling, instructional strategies, and the *pesantren*'s disciplined environment. The teacher consistently demonstrated disciplined behavior, such as punctuality, neat writing, and respectful communication, which served as a

powerful example for students. According to character education theory, exemplary behavior from educators significantly influences students' character formation (Fitri, 2012).

Formation of Creative Character through Calligraphy Learning

In addition to discipline, Islamic calligraphy learning was found to significantly foster creative character among *santriwati*. Creativity emerged primarily during the stages of decoration, composition, and artistic variation after students mastered basic writing rules.

Observations showed that students were encouraged to experiment with decorative elements such as floral motifs, geometric patterns, color combinations, and layout designs. While the basic text followed established calligraphic rules, students were given freedom to explore visual creativity in surrounding decorations.

Figure 2. Students' calligraphy works with decorative elements

This finding supports Munandar's (2004) view that creativity develops when learners are provided with a supportive environment that allows freedom of expression within a structured framework. The balance between rules and freedom enabled students to explore originality without losing aesthetic coherence.

The results also indicate that creativity in calligraphy learning is not limited to the final artwork, but is also evident in the learning process. Students demonstrated creative problem-solving when adjusting letter spacing, correcting visual imbalance, or modifying designs to improve harmony.

The teacher noted:

> *"Sometimes students make mistakes, but they find their own solutions. This process trains them to think creatively and not give up easily."*
> (Interview with Calligraphy Teacher)

This observation aligns with Treffinger's perspective that creative individuals are characterized by flexibility, persistence, and reflective thinking (Munandar, 2004). Creativity, therefore, is cultivated through iterative practice and thoughtful engagement rather than spontaneous inspiration alone.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic calligraphy learning effectively integrates discipline and creativity as complementary character traits. Discipline provides the structural foundation necessary for mastering calligraphic techniques, while creativity emerges as students gain confidence and technical proficiency. This integration challenges the misconception that discipline suppresses creativity; instead, it shows that disciplined practice can enhance creative capacity.

From an Islamic educational perspective, this integration is particularly significant. Writing Qur'anic verses and religious texts requires respect, accuracy, and responsibility, reinforcing moral discipline. At the same time, artistic interpretation allows students to connect emotionally and spiritually with the text, fostering creativity and personal meaning (Sirojudin AR, 2014).

Furthermore, the *pesantren* context amplifies these effects by embedding learning within a disciplined communal life. Daily routines, religious practices, and teacher role modeling collectively support the internalization of character values learned through calligraphy. This finding supports Haedari et al.'s (2004) argument that *pesantren* education is uniquely positioned to integrate moral, spiritual, and intellectual development.

The findings of this study also reveal a strong synergy between the formation of disciplinary and creative character through Islamic calligraphy learning. Rather than functioning as separate or opposing traits, discipline and creativity develop simultaneously through a structured yet flexible learning process. This synergy becomes evident as *santriwati* progress from basic technical mastery toward more expressive and innovative calligraphic works.

Discipline serves as the foundational framework within which creativity can flourish. Students who consistently follow writing rules, maintain focus, and demonstrate patience are better equipped to explore creative elements such as ornamentation, layout, and color harmony. This supports educational theories asserting that creativity does not emerge from complete freedom alone, but from disciplined engagement with meaningful constraints (Sagala, 2013).

> *"If students are disciplined in writing the letters correctly, their creativity becomes more visible. Without discipline, the artwork loses balance and meaning."*
> (Interview with Calligraphy Teacher)

Such finding aligns with Afifi's (1989) perspective that mastery of calligraphic rules is essential before artistic improvisation can be meaningfully applied. Discipline in this context is not perceived as restriction, but as a necessary process that sharpens aesthetic sensitivity and creative judgment.

Role of the Teacher in Character Formation

The role of the calligraphy teacher emerged as a critical factor in shaping both disciplinary and creative character. The teacher functioned not only as an instructor of technical skills, but also as a role model and moral guide. Observations revealed that the teacher consistently demonstrated disciplined behavior, such as punctuality, orderly preparation of materials, and meticulous writing practices.

Through verbal guidance and non-verbal modeling, the teacher emphasized values such as patience, humility, and perseverance. This approach reflects the principle of *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct) in Islamic education, where learners internalize values by observing and imitating educators' behavior (Akh, 2012). Moreover, the teacher encouraged creativity by providing constructive feedback rather than rigid evaluation. Students were guided to reflect on their work, identify weaknesses, and propose improvements independently. This pedagogical strategy fostered self-confidence and creative problem-solving skills among *santriwati*.

Interviews with *santriwati* revealed positive perceptions of Islamic calligraphy learning as both an enjoyable and meaningful activity. Students expressed that calligraphy learning differed from other subjects because it combined religious values, artistic expression, and personal reflection.

"When I write Qur'anic verses in calligraphy, I feel more connected to the meaning. It also trains me to be patient and creative at the same time."
(Interview with Santriwati)

Such responses indicate that calligraphy learning contributes to affective and spiritual development, not merely technical skill acquisition. This supports Syaharudin's (2001) assertion that calligraphy functions as a medium for internalizing Islamic values through aesthetic engagement.

Students also reported that calligraphy learning helped them develop self-discipline in other areas of *pesantren* life, such as time management and task completion. This transfer of character values suggests that calligraphy learning has a broader impact beyond the classroom.

Next, Institutional support was identified as a significant external factor influencing the effectiveness of calligraphy learning. The *pesantren* provided adequate facilities, allocated specific time for calligraphy instruction, and recognized students' achievements through exhibitions and internal competitions.

Figure 3. Display of students' calligraphy works

Such recognition motivated students to improve both discipline and creativity. According to character education theory, institutional reinforcement strengthens value internalization by providing consistent messages and rewards (Fitri, 2012). The *pesantren* environment, characterized by structured routines and religious discipline, further reinforced learning outcomes. Daily activities such as communal prayers, study sessions, and dormitory regulations complemented the values cultivated in calligraphy learning. This integrated environment supports Haedari et al.'s (2004) argument that *pesantren* education effectively blends formal instruction with character-building practices.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of arts-based learning in character education. While earlier studies focused primarily on language acquisition or artistic skill development, this study highlights the dual contribution of Islamic calligraphy learning to both discipline and creativity. Munandar (2004) emphasizes that creativity flourishes in environments that balance structure and freedom. This study confirms that disciplined calligraphic practice provides the necessary structure, while decorative and compositional freedom nurtures creativity. Similarly, Surakhmad (2012) argues that discipline is best cultivated through meaningful activities rather than coercive measures, a principle reflected in the calligraphy learning process observed in this study.

From an Islamic pedagogical perspective, the integration of religious content with artistic expression strengthens moral internalization. Writing Qur'anic verses requires reverence, accuracy, and responsibility, reinforcing ethical discipline. At the same time, aesthetic engagement enhances emotional connection and personal meaning (Sirojudin AR, 2014).

The results of this study have important implications for character-based learning in Islamic educational institutions. First, they demonstrate that artistic-religious learning such as Islamic calligraphy can serve as an effective medium for integrating discipline and creativity. Second, they highlight the importance of teacher role modeling and institutional support in maximizing learning outcomes. Educational institutions, particularly *pesantren* and Islamic schools, are encouraged to integrate culturally and religiously relevant arts into their curricula. Such integration not only preserves cultural heritage but also enhances character education in a holistic manner.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic calligraphy learning at Pondok *Pesantren* Modern Putri Darur Ridwan plays a significant role in shaping students' disciplinary and creative character. Through structured learning stages, disciplined routines, and guided creative exploration, *santriwati* develop punctuality, patience, accuracy, responsibility, and artistic originality.

Discipline and creativity are not contradictory traits in calligraphy learning; rather, they function synergistically. Discipline provides the technical and moral foundation necessary for creative expression, while creativity enhances students' engagement and personal connection to learning. The role of the teacher as a model and facilitator, supported by a conducive institutional environment, further strengthens character formation.

These findings suggest that Islamic calligraphy learning can be an effective model for character-based education in Islamic institutions. Future research may explore quantitative measurements of character outcomes or compare calligraphy learning practices across different *pesantren* to further enrich the field of character education.

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