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Developing Religious Competence Through the *Imamah* Examination: A Case Study of Female Students at Gontor for Girls Campus One

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Abstract: Religious competence is a fundamental objective of Islamic education, particularly in Islamic boarding schools, where students are expected to master religious knowledge, worship practices, and character values. This study aims to examine the role of the *Imamah* Examination in developing religious competence among female students at Gontor for Girls Campus One. The research employed a qualitative case study approach involving fifth-year female students, supervising teachers, and examiners. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the *Imamah* Examination serves not only as an assessment instrument but also as a learning process that enhances students' religious competence through direct practice and continuous guidance. The examination contributed to improving students' mastery of Qur'anic recitation, tajweed application, congregational prayer leadership, and understanding of prayer jurisprudence. In addition, it fostered self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, and leadership skills. Supporting factors included the religious boarding school environment, systematic mentoring, and structured assessment procedures, while limited preparation time and students' initial lack of confidence emerged as challenges. The study concludes that the *Imamah* Examination is an effective practice-based educational model for developing religious competence and character among female students in Islamic boarding schools.

Kata kunci: *Pengembangan Karakter, Pembelajaran Berbasis Pengalaman, Ujian Imamah, Pondok Pesantren, Kompetensi Keagamaan*

Abstrak: *Kompetensi keagamaan merupakan tujuan mendasar pendidikan Islam, khususnya di pondok pesantren, di mana para santri diharapkan mampu menguasai pengetahuan agama, praktik ibadah, dan nilai-nilai karakter. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran Ujian Imamah dalam mengembangkan kompetensi keagamaan santriwati di Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Kampus Satu. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif yang melibatkan santriwati kelas lima, guru pembimbing, dan penguji. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi, serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ujian Imamah tidak*

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hanya berfungsi sebagai instrumen penilaian, tetapi juga sebagai proses pembelajaran yang meningkatkan kompetensi keagamaan santriwati melalui praktik langsung dan bimbingan berkelanjutan. Ujian ini berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan penguasaan santriwati dalam membaca Al-Qur'an, penerapan ilmu tajwid, kepemimpinan salat berjamaah, dan pemahaman fikih salat. Selain itu, ujian ini juga menumbuhkan rasa percaya diri, tanggung jawab, kedisiplinan, dan keterampilan kepemimpinan. Faktor pendukung meliputi lingkungan pesantren yang religius, pendampingan yang sistematis, dan prosedur penilaian yang terstruktur, sedangkan keterbatasan waktu persiapan dan kurangnya rasa percaya diri santriwati pada tahap awal menjadi tantangan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Ujian Imamah merupakan model pendidikan berbasis praktik yang efektif untuk mengembangkan kompetensi keagamaan dan karakter santriwati di pondok pesantren.

INTRODUCTION

Religious competence has become one of the primary objectives of Islamic education, particularly within Islamic boarding schools/ *pesantren*, which aim not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to cultivate students' religious character and practical religious skills (Alamin et al., 2024). In contemporary educational discourse, religious competence encompasses cognitive understanding of religious teachings, practical worship skills, and the internalization of religious values manifested in daily behavior. Consequently, Islamic educational institutions are expected to provide learning experiences that integrate knowledge, practice, and character formation in a holistic manner (Miftahuddin et al., 2024).

The importance of strengthening religious competence has become increasingly relevant in the midst of rapid social transformation, technological advancement, and moral challenges faced by adolescents (Ashari et al., 2022). Various studies have indicated that Islamic boarding schools possess unique educational characteristics that enable continuous religious guidance through a twenty-four-hour educational environment, such an environment facilitates the internalization of religious values through habituation, supervision, role modeling, and practical religious activities (Husaini & Hasanah, 2024). The twenty-four-hour educational environment enables religious learning to extend beyond the classroom and become part of students' everyday lives. Consequently, *pesantren* have considerable potential to develop religious competence simultaneously with students' character through the integration of knowledge, worship practices, discipline, and social responsibility.

Nevertheless, although the role of *pesantren* in developing students' religious competence has received considerable attention, the specific role of structured practical religious examinations as part of the learning process remains relatively underexplored. Existing discussions tend to emphasize religious learning, habituation, and the general role of the *pesantren* environment in shaping students' religious attitudes and behavior. Less attention has been given to how a practical examination can function beyond its conventional role as an assessment instrument and become a structured learning experience that strengthens students' religious competence. This gap is particularly

relevant in the context of *pesantren* education, where students are expected not only to understand religious teachings theoretically but also to demonstrate their ability to apply them correctly and responsibly in practice.

One example of such a structured practical examination is the *Imamah* Examination at Gontor for Girls Campus One. The examination requires students to demonstrate practical religious competencies, particularly those related to Qur'anic recitation, the application of tajweed, and the performance and leadership of congregational prayer. More importantly, the preparation and implementation of the examination involve continuous guidance, practice, supervision, and evaluation. Thus, the *Imamah* Examination provides a distinctive context for examining the relationship between assessment and learning in the development of religious competence. Unlike studies that primarily examine religious competence as an outcome of classroom instruction or general *pesantren* habituation, this study positions the *Imamah* Examination as a practice-based educational process in which assessment, direct practice, and character development are interconnected.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to examine the role of the *Imamah* Examination in developing the religious competence of female students at Gontor for Girls Campus One. The study specifically explores how the examination contributes to students' practical religious competence and character development, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors involved in its implementation. By focusing on the *Imamah* Examination as both an assessment instrument and a learning process, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on Islamic education by providing a more specific understanding of how structured practical examinations can be utilized as a means of developing religious competence within the *pesantren* educational system.

In Islamic boarding school education, religious competence is not limited to theoretical mastery of Islamic sciences but also includes the ability to practice religious teachings correctly (Syarifah et al., 2023). This understanding is closely related to the concept of experiential learning, which views learning as a process through which knowledge is developed by transforming experience. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of information, experiential learning emphasizes active involvement in concrete experiences, reflection on those experiences, conceptual understanding, and the application of newly developed knowledge or skills in subsequent situations. In this process, learning becomes meaningful when students are directly involved in activities that allow them to practice, evaluate, and improve their competencies through experience (Jubaedah et al., 2024).

The experiential learning perspective is particularly relevant to religious education in *pesantren* because many religious competencies require direct practice and repeated performance. Religious skills such as Qur'anic recitation, the application of tajweed, prayer procedures, and leadership in congregational worship cannot be developed optimally through theoretical instruction alone. Students need opportunities to perform religious practices, receive guidance and feedback, reflect on their performance, and repeat the practice until they achieve greater accuracy and confidence. Thus, experiential learning provides a theoretical basis for understanding how practical

religious activities can transform religious knowledge into observable skills and personal dispositions, including confidence, responsibility, discipline, and leadership.

Within this framework, the *Imamah* Examination can be understood not merely as an assessment mechanism but as a structured experiential learning process. The examination requires students to engage directly in religious practices, particularly leading congregational prayer, reciting the Qur'an, applying the principles of tajweed, and demonstrating their understanding of the jurisprudence of worship. The preparation for the examination also involves repeated practice, guidance from teachers, correction of mistakes, and evaluation of students' performance. These activities correspond to the experiential learning process in which students gain experience through practice, reflect on their performance through feedback and evaluation, develop a better understanding of the religious principles underlying the practice, and subsequently apply the improved knowledge and skills in subsequent performances.

Furthermore, the experiential nature of the *Imamah* Examination extends beyond the development of technical religious skills. Performing religious duties before a congregation places students in situations that require them to exercise confidence, responsibility, discipline, and leadership. In this sense, the examination provides an authentic context in which religious knowledge and values are translated into action. Therefore, the experiential learning perspective offers an appropriate analytical framework for examining how the *Imamah* Examination contributes to the development of religious competence by connecting knowledge, direct practice, reflection, improvement, and character formation.

One of the educational programs designed to develop these competencies is the *Imamah* Examination. The examination serves as both an assessment and a training mechanism through which students demonstrate their ability to lead congregational prayer, recite the Qur'an accurately, apply the principles of tajweed, and understand the jurisprudence of worship. More importantly, the *Imamah* Examination provides opportunities for students to develop leadership qualities, self-confidence, discipline, and accountability while performing religious duties before a congregation.

Previous studies have extensively discussed character education and religious development in Islamic boarding schools. Research by Miftahuddin et al. (2024) revealed that character education in *pesantren* is effectively cultivated through systematic religious activities and continuous supervision. Similarly, Desfita et al. (2023) found that religiosity serves as a fundamental pillar of character education within Islamic boarding schools. Other studies have highlighted the significance of habituation, exemplary conduct, and direct religious practice in strengthening students' religious character and discipline (Wahyudi et al., 2024). Previous studies have extensively examined religious habituation, character education, and experiential learning within Islamic boarding school contexts. These studies have demonstrated the importance of habituation and direct experience in fostering students' religious attitudes, character, and practical competencies.

However, existing research has paid relatively limited attention to structured religious examinations as more than assessment instruments. In particular, little is

known about how a religious examination can simultaneously function as an assessment mechanism, a practice-based learning process, and a means of developing students' leadership competencies. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of the *Imamah* Examination at Gontor for Girls Campus One, where female students are required to demonstrate religious knowledge and practices through direct performance. Therefore, this study examines the *Imamah* Examination not merely as an evaluative procedure but as a practice-based religious learning process, while also exploring its role in developing religious competence and leadership and identifying the supporting and hindering factors in its implementation.

This research seeks to fill that gap by investigating how the *Imamah* Examination contributes to the development of religious competence among female students at Gontor for Girls Campus One. As one of Indonesia's leading Islamic boarding schools, Gontor implements a comprehensive educational system that integrates religious learning, character formation, discipline, and leadership development. Within this context, the *Imamah* Examination constitutes an important component of religious training, particularly for fifth-year female students who are expected to demonstrate a higher level of religious competence and leadership readiness.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of the *Imamah* Examination and its contribution to developing religious competence among female students at Gontor for Girls Campus One. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is the *Imamah* Examination implemented as a practice-based religious learning process at Gontor for Girls Campus One? (2) How does the *Imamah* Examination contribute to the development of female students' religious competence and character? and (3) What factors support and inhibit the implementation of the *Imamah* Examination? By addressing these questions, this study seeks to contribute to the discourse on Islamic education by providing empirical evidence on how a structured practical religious examination can function not only as an assessment instrument but also as a learning process for fostering students' religious competence and character development.



Figure 1.
Dimensions of Religious Competence Demonstrated in the *Imamah* Examination

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. A qualitative case study is appropriate for investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and for gaining an in-depth understanding of participants'

experiences, perceptions, and practices. The case study design was selected because this research aimed to explore comprehensively how the *Imamah* Examination contributes to the development of religious competence among female students at Gontor for Girls Campus One. Qualitative case studies allow researchers to examine educational programs holistically and to capture the complexity of social and educational processes within a particular institutional setting (Mtisi, 2022).

The research was conducted at Gontor for Girls Campus One, an Islamic boarding school that systematically implements the *Imamah* Examination as part of its religious education program. The participants consisted of fifth-year female students who had participated in the *Imamah* Examination, supervising ustadzah, and examination assessors. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they possessed direct experience and relevant information regarding the implementation of the program and its educational outcomes.

Table 1.
Participant Profile

Code	Participant	Position	Role in Research
I1	Student 1	Fifth-Year Student	*Imamah* Examination Participant
I2	Student 2	Fifth-Year Student	*Imamah* Examination Participant
I3	Student 3	Fifth-Year Student	*Imamah* Examination Participant
T1	Ustadzah	Supervisor	Program Supervisor
E1	Examiner	Assessor	*Imamah* Examination Assessor

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to obtain firsthand information regarding the implementation of the *Imamah* Examination, students' performance, interactions during the examination, and the learning environment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants to explore their experiences, perceptions, and understanding of the examination and its contribution to religious competence development. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted individually in a setting that allowed participants to respond comfortably. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for researchers to probe participants' responses and generate rich and detailed data (Robinson & Robinson, 2023). Documentation, including examination guidelines, assessment records, institutional reports, and other relevant supporting documents, was utilized to complement and verify information obtained from observations and interviews.

The data were analyzed through a systematic thematic analysis process. First, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, while observation notes and relevant documents were organized according to their respective sources. Second, the researchers conducted initial coding by identifying meaningful statements and segments of data related to the research questions. Codes were generated both from recurring ideas

emerging from the data and from concepts relevant to the study, particularly religious competence, practical learning, and experiential learning. Third, related codes were compared, grouped, and categorized into broader categories. Fourth, the categories were reviewed and compared across participants and data sources to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences. Finally, the categories were synthesized into overarching themes that represented the main findings of the study. This process enabled the researchers to move systematically from raw data to codes, categories, and themes and to interpret how the *Imamah* Examination contributed to the development of students' religious competence. Thematic analysis enables researchers to identify recurring patterns and meanings within qualitative data and construct a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation(Shreya & Dey, 2022)

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study employed data triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from three data sources: observations, interviews with students and educators, and relevant documentation. The researchers also compared perspectives among the three groups of participants students, supervising ustadzah, and examiners to identify consistencies and discrepancies in their accounts. In addition, member checking was conducted by providing selected participants with summaries of the interview interpretations to confirm whether the researchers' interpretations accurately represented their experiences and perspectives. Any clarification or correction provided by participants was incorporated into the final interpretation. These procedures strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by ensuring that the interpretations were supported by multiple sources and remained grounded in participants' experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Implementation of the *Imamah* Examination at Gontor for Girls Campus One

Based on observation data, the *Imamah* Examination at Gontor for Girls Campus One was implemented through several stages, namely preparation, guidance, practice, examination, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, students received intensive training on congregational prayer procedures, Qur'anic recitation, tajweed, and the responsibilities of an imam. Observation findings showed that students participated in repeated practice sessions before undertaking the final examination.

Documentation data indicated that the examination employed structured assessment criteria covering several aspects, including fluency of Qur'anic recitation, accuracy of tajweed application, correctness of prayer movements, leadership performance, discipline, and self-confidence. The examination guidelines also showed that students were required to demonstrate both theoretical understanding and practical competence related to congregational prayer. These findings reflect the implementation of experiential religious learning in which students acquire religious competence through direct practice and continuous guidance (Cahyo et al., 2022).

Table 2.
Observation Findings on the Implementation of the *Imamah* Examination

Aspect Observed	Findings
Preparation Activities	Students received systematic guidance before the examination
Qur'anic Recitation	Most students demonstrated fluent recitation
Tajweed Application	Students applied tajweed rules during prayer
Leadership Performance	Students led congregational prayer independently
Discipline	Students attended preparation sessions regularly

Religious Competencies Developed Through the *Imamah* Examination

Observation findings revealed several forms of religious competence developed through the *Imamah* Examination. Participants perceived the *Imamah* Examination as contributing to the development of their religious competence.

Interview data showed that participants perceived significant improvement in their religious abilities after participating in the examination. One participant stated "*The examination helped me understand the requirements and responsibilities of becoming an imam. I became more careful in my recitation and prayer performance*." (I1 Student 1). Another participant explained "*Before participating in the examination, I often felt unsure about leading prayer. Through continuous practice, I became more confident and prepared*." (I2 Student 2).

Documentation records further indicated that students who successfully completed the examination fulfilled the minimum competency standards established by the institution. Assessment reports showed improvement in students' practical worship skills and religious performance.

Table 3.
Religious Competencies Identified from the Data

Competency	Evidence from Findings
Qur'anic Recitation	Improved fluency and pronunciation
Tajweed Mastery	Correct application of recitation rules
Prayer Leadership	Ability to lead congregational prayer
Religious Knowledge	Better understanding of prayer jurisprudence
Worship Skills	Proper implementation of prayer procedures

Development of Leadership and Self-Confidence

Observation results showed that students became more confident when performing in front of examiners and fellow students. Although several participants initially displayed signs of nervousness, repeated practice sessions gradually reduced anxiety and increased confidence (Rochmat et al., 2022).

Interview findings revealed that many participants considered the examination an important opportunity to develop leadership skills. Students reported becoming more responsible, disciplined, and prepared to guide others in religious activities. One student

explained "*Standing in front of a congregation taught me responsibility. I learned that an imam must be prepared and become a good example for others*." (I3 Student 3).

Documentation data also indicated that leadership performance constituted one of the primary assessment indicators within the examination process. These findings demonstrate that the *Imamah* Examination facilitates not only religious skill development but also leadership training, which is considered an important outcome of experiential learning programs (Mccarron et al., 2022).

Table 4.
Leadership and Self-Confidence Indicators

Indicator	Observation Findings
Self-confidence	Increased after repeated practice
Responsibility	Students prepared seriously before examination
Leadership	Students managed congregational prayer activities
Communication	Students delivered prayer recitations clearly

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Observation, interview, and documentation data identified several factors influencing the implementation of the *Imamah* Examination. Supporting factors included a conducive religious environment, continuous supervision by ustadzah, structured examination procedures, and regular worship activities. Participants reported that daily religious practices within the boarding school environment helped them prepare for the examination.

Meanwhile, inhibiting factors included students' initial lack of confidence and limited preparation time due to academic and boarding school activities. Several participants reported feeling nervous when performing before examiners and fellow students. Despite these challenges, interview data indicated that continuous mentoring, repeated practice, and constructive feedback helped students overcome these difficulties throughout the preparation process.

Table 5.
Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
Religious boarding school environment	Initial lack of confidence
Continuous supervision	Anxiety during examination
Structured assessment system	Limited preparation time

Discussion

The *Imamah* Examination as an Experiential Religious Learning Model

The findings indicate that the *Imamah* Examination functions not only as an assessment instrument but also as an experiential learning model that facilitates the development of religious competence among female students. Through continuous practice, supervision, and evaluation, students are provided with opportunities to transform religious knowledge into practical religious skills. Observation and interview

data revealed that students developed a deeper understanding of congregational prayer procedures and became more proficient in leading prayer after participating in repeated training sessions.

These findings support the experiential learning theory, which argues that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively engage in concrete experiences and subsequently reflect upon them to construct new knowledge and skills. Within the context of Islamic boarding schools, religious competence cannot be developed solely through classroom instruction; it requires direct involvement in authentic religious practices. Similar findings were reported by Kistoro et al. (2022), who found that experience-based religious learning contributes significantly to students' religious understanding and behavioral transformation.

The *Imamah* Examination therefore represents a practical manifestation of experiential learning within Islamic education, enabling students to internalize religious values through active participation rather than passive reception of knowledge (Sasputra & Syarif, 2026).

Development of Religious Competence Through Practice-Based Assessment

The study found that students demonstrated improvements in Qur'anic recitation, tajweed mastery, prayer performance, and understanding of prayer jurisprudence. Documentation records further confirmed that students achieved competency standards established by the institution.

These findings align with previous studies suggesting that competence develops more effectively when assessment activities are integrated with authentic performance tasks. Practice-based assessment enables students to demonstrate knowledge application in real contexts while simultaneously receiving feedback for improvement. In Islamic educational settings, such assessment models are particularly important because religious competence encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Authentic assessment enables educators to evaluate students' cognitive understanding, practical skills, and affective development simultaneously, making it particularly suitable for Islamic religious education (Ramdhan, 2023.).

Performance-based assessment provides authentic evidence of learners' competence because students demonstrate knowledge through real-world performance rather than written examinations alone.

The findings also reinforce the argument that religious competence should be understood as a holistic construct involving knowledge, practical skills, attitudes, and behavioral commitments. As observed in this study, students who participated in the *Imamah* Examination not only improved their technical abilities but also strengthened their commitment to religious responsibilities.

Leadership Development Through the *Imamah* Examination

One significant finding of this study is the emergence of leadership competencies among participants. Observation data demonstrated that students became more capable of managing responsibilities, making decisions, and leading congregational worship

activities. Interview findings further revealed that many participants experienced increased confidence after repeatedly serving as prayer leaders.

These findings are consistent with McCarron et al. (2022), who argue that authentic leadership experiences play a critical role in developing leadership identity and self-efficacy. Leadership competencies are not merely acquired through theoretical instruction but emerge through opportunities to practice leadership roles in real situations.

Within the context of Islamic boarding schools, the role of an imam extends beyond ritual leadership. An imam is expected to demonstrate responsibility, discipline, confidence, and exemplary conduct. Therefore, the *Imamah* Examination contributes not only to the development of religious competence but also to the cultivation of leadership qualities required for students' future social and religious roles. This finding also supports recent studies emphasizing the relationship between religious education and leadership development in Islamic institutions (Azzuhri et al., 2024).

The Contribution of the Boarding School Environment

The findings highlight the importance of the boarding school environment in supporting students' religious competence development. Continuous supervision, daily religious activities, institutional discipline, and regular mentoring created a learning environment that facilitated the internalization of religious values.

This result is consistent with previous studies showing that *pesantren* education promotes character formation through habituation, role modeling, and continuous religious engagement (Kartiko et al., 2026). The educational environment at Gontor for Girls Campus One provides students with frequent opportunities to practice religious responsibilities, thereby reinforcing both competence and character formation (Desfita et al., 2023). The integration of formal learning, religious activities, and character education appears to be one of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the *Imamah* Examination program (Ruksin et al., 2026).

Challenges in Developing Religious Competence

Despite the positive outcomes, the findings also identified several challenges. The most frequently reported obstacle was students' initial lack of confidence when performing before examiners and fellow students. Anxiety and fear of making mistakes often emerged during the early stages of preparation. These findings correspond with previous studies indicating that performance anxiety commonly affects students participating in public religious or leadership activities. However, repeated practice, mentoring, and constructive feedback were found to gradually reduce these difficulties.

The findings suggest that confidence-building strategies should remain an integral component of religious competence development programs. Providing students with supportive learning environments and opportunities for gradual exposure to leadership roles may enhance the effectiveness of similar educational initiatives. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the *Imamah* Examination serves as an effective mechanism for developing religious competence, leadership skills, and religious character among

female students. The program illustrates how practice-based religious education can contribute to holistic student development within Islamic boarding school settings.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the *Imamah* Examination serves as an effective mechanism for developing religious competence, leadership skills, and religious character among female students. The program illustrates how practice-based religious education can contribute to holistic student development within Islamic boarding school settings.



Figure 2.
Conceptual Model of Religious Competence Development Through the *Imamah* Examination

Figure 2 summarizes the findings of this study by illustrating the process through which the *Imamah* Examination functions as an experiential learning model. Beginning with structured preparation, guided practice, and authentic assessment, the program facilitates the development of Qur'anic competence, worship competence, leadership competence, and religious knowledge. These competencies collectively contribute to broader character development, including self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, and commitment to religious values.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that The findings suggest that the *Imamah* Examination functions as a practice-based mechanism that supports the development of religious competence. Through systematic preparation, guided practice, authentic assessment, and continuous mentoring, the examination enhances students' competence in Qur'anic recitation, prayer leadership, worship jurisprudence, and congregational prayer practices. Beyond technical religious skills, the program also fosters self-confidence, responsibility, discipline, and leadership, indicating that practice-based religious education contributes to holistic student development.

The findings contribute to the growing discourse on Islamic education by providing empirical evidence that authentic religious assessment can simultaneously strengthen cognitive, practical, and affective dimensions of religious competence. Unlike conventional assessment models that primarily emphasize theoretical knowledge, the *Imamah* Examination integrates religious learning with real-life worship practices and

character formation. These findings also offer practical implications for Islamic boarding schools and other Islamic educational institutions seeking to implement competency-based religious education through structured mentoring, repeated practice, and authentic performance assessment.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single Islamic boarding school and involved a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other *pesantren* contexts. In addition, the qualitative approach provides an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences but does not quantitatively measure the extent of competence development. Future studies are therefore encouraged to examine similar programs across different Islamic boarding schools, employ comparative or mixed-methods designs, and investigate the long-term impact of practice-based religious assessment on students' religious competence, leadership, and character development.

Overall, the *Imamah* Examination represents an innovative educational practice that integrates authentic assessment, experiential learning, and character education within the *pesantren* environment. By combining religious knowledge with direct worship experiences and continuous guidance, the program prepares students not only to perform religious responsibilities competently but also to become confident, responsible, and value-oriented Muslim leaders. Consequently, this study reinforces the strategic role of Islamic boarding schools in cultivating religious competence and holistic character development through authentic educational practices.

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