The Social Competencies of Pesantren Teachers in Shaping Students' Character in the Digital Era

Asep Supriatna [1], Abdussalam DZ [2], Abdul Karim [3], Jalaludin [4], Maftuhah Dewi [5]

[1] Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia; aasepstea@gmail.com

[2] Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia; abdussalamdz@bungabangsacirebon.ac.id

[3] Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon, Indonesia; abdul.karim@umc.ac.id

[4] Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia; jalaludin@bungabangsacirebon.ac.id

[5] Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia; maftukhadewi77@gmail.com

Abstract	This study aims to analyze the development of social competencies among *pesantren* teachers in shaping students' character in the digital era. This qualitative research was conducted at Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School in Karawang, involving 10 teachers and 15 students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using a thematic analysis framework based on the work of Miles and Huberman. The findings show that teachers at Al-Khoir demonstrate social competence through role modeling, empathetic communication, and the instilling of moral values in daily routines. However, there are challenges in digital literacy, as teachers struggle to integrate digital tools into their teaching due to limited resources and inadequate training. This gap in digital competence is influenced by the *pesantren*'s traditional values and leadership style, which prioritize religious education over technological integration. These findings contribute to the literature on teacher social competence and character education by highlighting the importance of enhancing digital competencies in teachers. The study offers practical recommendations for integrating digital literacy training into professional development programs at *pesantren*, enabling teachers to navigate the digital era more effectively and enhance their character-building efforts. Furthermore, this research offers valuable insights for both theory and practice, suggesting that strengthening digital literacy in teacher training programs is crucial for preparing educators to effectively navigate the challenges of the digital age while promoting character development in students.
Keywords	Digital Era; Islamic Character; Social Competence

Corresponding Author
Asep Supriatna
Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia; aasepstea@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era presents a multitude of challenges and opportunities for educators, particularly in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). While technology has revolutionized various sectors of life, it has had a particularly significant impact on the delivery and experience of education (Kumar, 2020; Rosyad et al., 2025). The increasing integration of digital tools in teaching has become a necessity, as highlighted by global surveys that reveal a significant gap in teachers' preparedness to utilize these tools effectively

in the classroom (Chiu et al., 2024; Purnomo et al., 2024). For educators to navigate the complexities of the future, it is essential to cultivate skills like critical thinking, responsibility, and the ability to adapt to evolving technological landscapes (Fathurohman et al., 2023; Meilana et al., 2024; Qurrota et al., 2023). However, many traditional Islamic education frameworks, including *pesantren*, face the challenge of reconciling modern technological advancements with the preservation of religious and moral teachings, which are central to their educational mission (Mariyono et al., 2023; Norman et al., 2023). This tension necessitates a systematic approach to professional development that equips teachers with both digital and pedagogical skills to guide students effectively through this evolving era (Rosyad et al., 2025; Salam et al., 2024; Sugiyanto et al., 2021).

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character and providing guidance beyond academic instruction. They are expected to embody social-emotional competence, which allows them to engage positively with students and foster an environment conducive to moral and ethical development (Mayang et al., 2024; Okpatrioka & Sopian, 2023). Social competence, which encompasses the ability to build respectful relationships and communicate effectively, is crucial in *pesantren* settings, where teachers serve not only as educators but also as moral exemplars (Mustikasari & Rahayu, 2023; T et al., 2024). As the educational landscape rapidly changes, teachers must continuously adapt their social competencies to meet the evolving needs of their students (Dewi et al., 2024; Sitompul, 2022).

Despite its importance, a significant gap remains in research regarding the development of social competence among teachers in Islamic boarding schools, particularly in the context of the digital era. While studies have acknowledged the importance of teacher competence in general, few have explored how these competencies intersect with the growing influence of technology in educational settings (Budiyanti et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2022; Narahaubun., 2024). Most research tends to focus on general teaching competencies, without addressing the specific challenges posed by the digital age in *pesantren* environments, where traditional methods often dominate. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how *pesantren* teachers develop and apply their social competencies in shaping students' character in the digital era.

This research aims to analyze the development of social competencies among *pesantren* teachers in shaping students' character in the digital era, with a focus on Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School in Karawang. By examining this case, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into how teachers can adapt their social skills to effectively guide students through the complexities of both traditional and digital learning environments.

2.   METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore the teacher development strategies in the digital era at Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School in Karawang. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gather in-depth data and provide a detailed description of the phenomenon under study. The descriptive design enables the researcher to represent the ongoing processes and experiences in the field without making premature interpretations or overgeneralizing the findings. This design is useful for providing rich descriptions of teacher development practices and the integration of technology in the *pesantren*, thus offering a comprehensive view of the subject matter (Ramdani et al., 2021).

The research was conducted at Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School, located in Karawang, West Java. This location was chosen because the *pesantren* is known for combining religious education with the integration of information technology among teachers and students. The *pesantren* has actively incorporated technology in various aspects of teaching and learning, making it an ideal context for mapping teacher development strategies in a digital environment. The study involved 35 participants: 5 school administrators, 10 teachers, and 20 students. The selection of participants was based on specific

criteria: administrators were chosen for their involvement in decision-making regarding educational policies at the school, while teachers were selected for their roles in teaching and participating in technology training programs. Students were chosen to provide insights into how they perceive the changes in learning methods involving technology. This participant selection ensures a comprehensive understanding of how technology is implemented in education and teacher development at the *pesantren*.

To gather the required data, the researcher employed several data collection methods, including observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to obtain direct insight into daily activities at the *pesantren*, specifically focusing on how technology was used in the teaching process. The researcher systematically observed classroom interactions between teachers and students, as well as other activities involving technology in the *pesantren*, such as administrative tasks. These observations were conducted over a period of two months, with field notes taken both during and immediately after the observations to capture key moments and relevant contextual details. This approach aligns with Hayati et al., (2024) Recommendation of recording important events that offer deeper insights into the research context.

In addition to observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school administrators, teachers, students, and members of the surrounding community. The semi-structured interview method was chosen because it allows for more in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences regarding the use of technology in education. For teachers, some example questions included: "How do you use technology in daily teaching?" and "What challenges do you face in integrating technology into religious education?" Interviews with administrators focused on policies and programs related to teacher development in technology, with questions like: "What is the *pesantren*'s policy on integrating technology into teaching?" and "What strategies are being implemented to develop teachers' technological skills?" Students were interviewed to gather their opinions on how the integration of technology affected their learning experiences, with questions such as: "How do you feel about the use of technology in your lessons?" and "What benefits have you experienced from the technology training provided at the *pesantren*?" These interviews aimed to gather a range of perspectives on the impact of technology on teaching and learning (Paujiah & Solihin, 2021).

The documentation method was also used to collect relevant written materials, such as the *pesantren*'s internal policies, teacher training reports, and student attendance records. This documentation provided additional context about the school's educational policies and the use of technology in both administrative and teaching processes. It was also used to supplement the data gathered from interviews and observations, offering a deeper understanding of the processes occurring beyond the direct interactions observed in the field.

All data collected through observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using the data analysis techniques outlined by Matthew B Miles, (2014), which include three main stages: data reduction, data display, and data verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher filtered out irrelevant data and focused on the themes directly related to the research objectives. The relevant data were then categorized to facilitate further analysis. In the data display stage, the reduced data was presented in narrative form or visualizations to help the researcher organize and make sense of the information. This presentation facilitates the identification of patterns and relationships within the data, thereby ensuring a systematic understanding of the findings. Finally, in the data verification stage, triangulation was applied to verify the consistency and validity of the data. Triangulation involved comparing and cross-checking data from various sources, including interviews with administrators, teachers, and students, as well as observations and documentation. This approach ensures that the findings are credible and consistent (Matthew B Miles, 1994).

By employing a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, this study provides a detailed and comprehensive understanding of how Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School implements teacher

development strategies in the digital era and the impact of these strategies on the teaching and learning process. The research provides valuable insights into how technology can be effectively integrated into education and teacher development in Islamic boarding schools, contributing to a broader understanding of how *pesantren* in Indonesia can adopt digital tools to enhance the quality of education and professional development for teachers.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Finding

Through careful field data collection, the research team gained several insights into the social competence of teachers at Al-Khoir Karawang Islamic boarding school and how this competence helps shape students' characters in the digital era. In this report, the author focuses the discussion on social competence, drawing on findings from direct classroom observations, interviews with staff, students, and parents, as well as a review of relevant school documents.
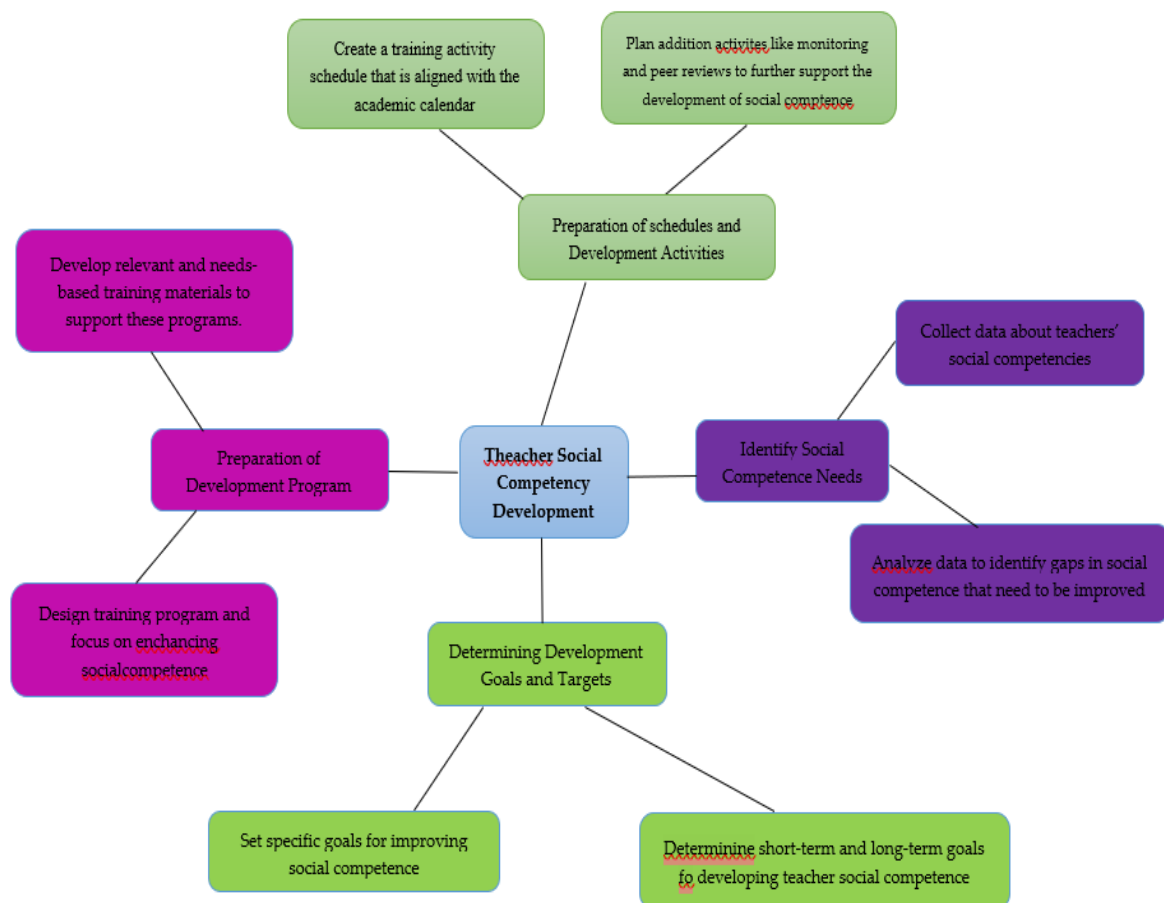
Figure 1. Planning for Teacher Social Competency Development

Based on the results of interviews conducted by the author as part of the research, the following data were obtained. According to Ustadz Dading Muhtadin, he is a member of the teaching staff at al-Khoir Islamic boarding school. When asked about the social competence of teachers, he said: "As an experienced Islamic boarding school teacher, I can confidently say that Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School has a good level of social competence among its students. Every day, I see how interactions between students, fellow students, and between students and the management board and teachers take place with mutual respect and care. Our students are accustomed to collaborating on various activities,

ranging from academic tasks to social and religious endeavors. They are also skilled in communicating and interacting with their surroundings, showing empathy and concern for others. "This reflects our efforts to shape the character of students who are not only superior in religious aspects, but also in social skills, which are crucial in their daily lives and future."
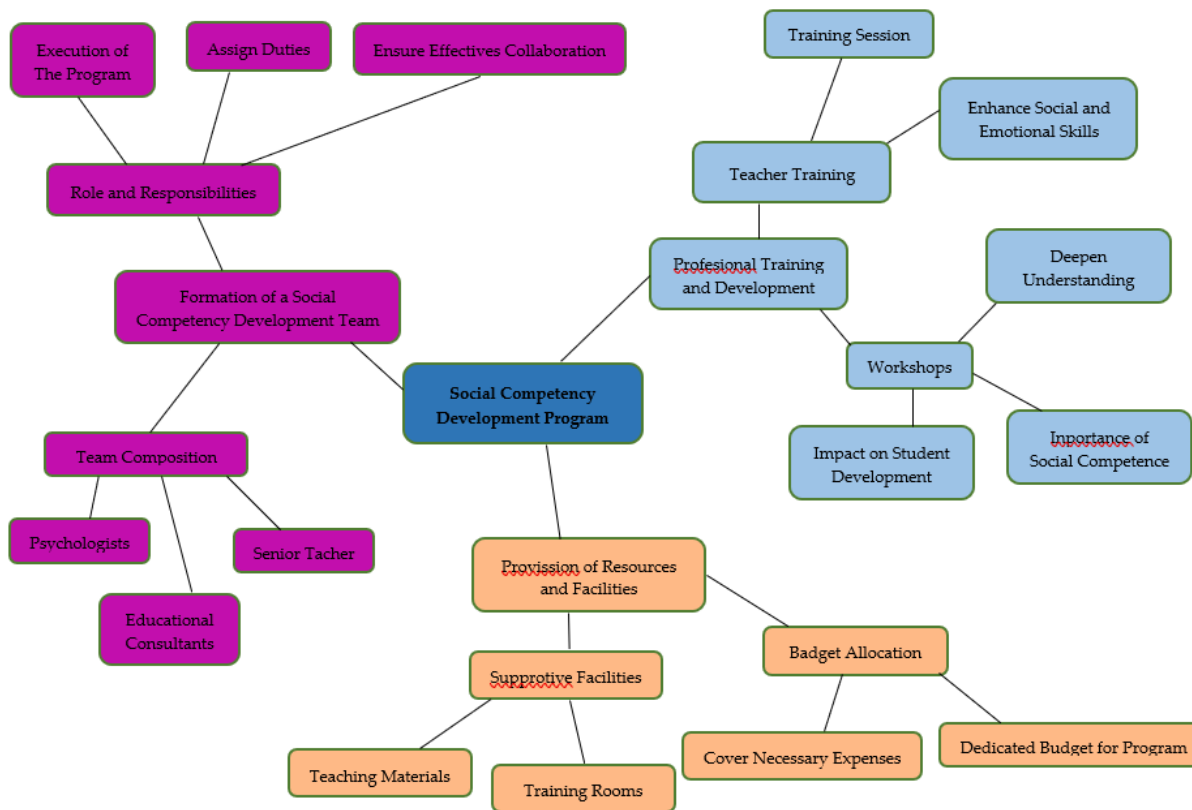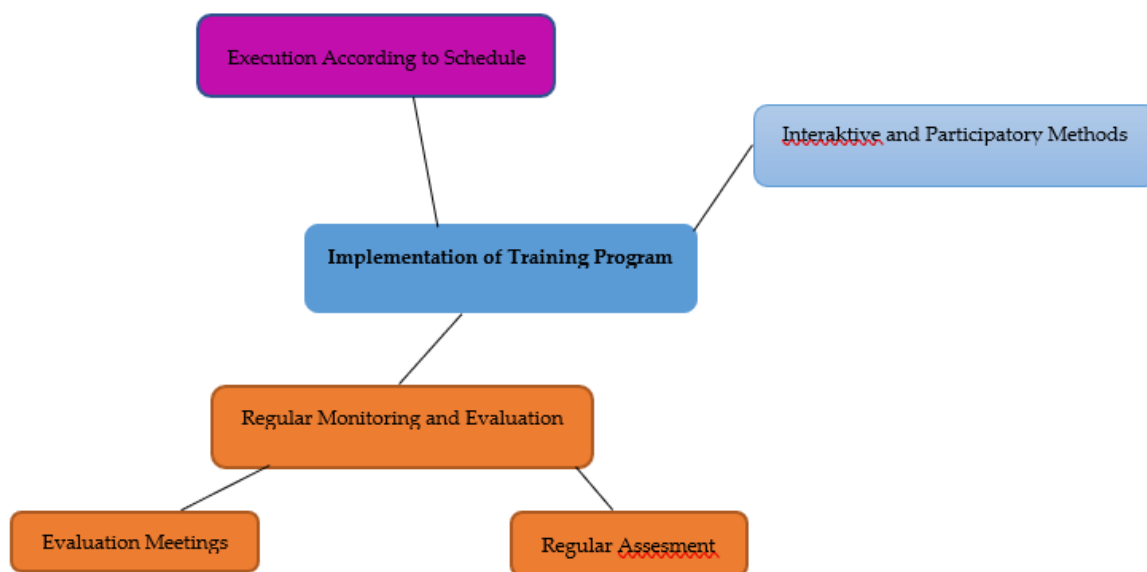

Figure 2. Organizing Social Competency Development Programs

Furthermore, when asked a question about socialization between teachers, he said: "As a teacher at Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School, socializing with fellow teachers is important in improving our social competence. Every week, we hold a teaching staff meeting to share experiences, update teaching strategies, and assess students' progress. In these meetings, we not only discuss academic aspects but also share personal experiences and offer support to one another in facing daily challenges. Socializing with fellow teachers helps us broaden our understanding of different points of view and approaches to teaching, as well as strengthening solid working relationships between us. "Thus, social competence in the context of socialization with fellow teachers becomes the basis for effective collaboration in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students."

These two statements illustrate the nuances of the educational environment at the Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School, which emphasizes character development and social competence in its students. Using their experience and confidence as experienced teachers, they assess the students' level of social competence with confidence. This Islamic boarding school is described as an environment that fosters positive social interaction among students, teachers, and board members, cultivating a culture of mutual respect, care, and cooperation. Apart from focusing on religious aspects, Islamic boarding schools also emphasize the development of social skills essential for students' future success and well-being. Teachers at Islamic boarding schools actively collaborate through weekly teaching staff meetings, where they share experiences, teaching strategies, and evaluate students' progress. In addition, these meetings also provide a forum for providing emotional and professional support among fellow teachers, which helps reduce stress and improve well-being. Through socialization with fellow teachers, educators at

Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School expand their understanding of various teaching approaches and strengthen solid working relationships. The social competencies developed in this process not only create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students but also reflect the Islamic boarding school's commitment to forming a holistic character in students who are ready to face future challenges.

Then, *Kiai* Asep Hilman Hasanudin, as head of the al-Khoir Islamic boarding school. When asked about the social competence of Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School teachers, he said, "As the leader of the Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School, I am proud to say that we really pay attention to and appreciate the level of social competence possessed by our teachers. We recognize that social competence is very important in shaping the character of students and creating a conducive learning environment. Therefore, we always encourage social interaction between our teachers, both in professional and personal contexts. We facilitate various social and collaborative activities among the teaching staff, including staff meetings, personal development workshops, and discussions on effective teaching strategies. Additionally, we provide the necessary support and training to enhance teachers' social and collaborative skills. We believe that good relationships between teachers not only strengthen our teaching team but also have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and character formation of students. With solid cooperation and good social competence among our staff, we are confident that Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Khoir will continue to be a place that provides a holistic and quality educational experience for our students".

Figure 3. Implementation of the Social Competency Development Program

Then he continued his explanation regarding the development of teachers' social competence in the Al-Khoir Islamic boarding school environment. "In addition, we monitor and guide students' online activities, including their interactions on social media. Our teachers are trained to understand online dynamics and provide guidance to students on interacting positively and responsibly in the digital world. We also provide a platform interactive and well-managed online learning platform, where our teachers can utilize technology to facilitate collaborative learning and build an inclusive learning community. With these strategies, Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School seeks to develop teachers' social competence in dealing with the challenges and opportunities brought by the digital era, so that they can continue to be effective in shaping the character of students in a context that continues to develop, as at the beginning of the month, we used digital-based teaching. One of the teaching staff members we sent

to participate in the rukyat reckoning training is Ustadz Jenal Mutakin. He now serves as chairman of Lajnah Falakiyah Nahdlatul Ulama PCNU Karawang. That is the explanation from the Leader of Al Khoir Islamic Boarding School. The following is proof of the certificate from his training and awards.
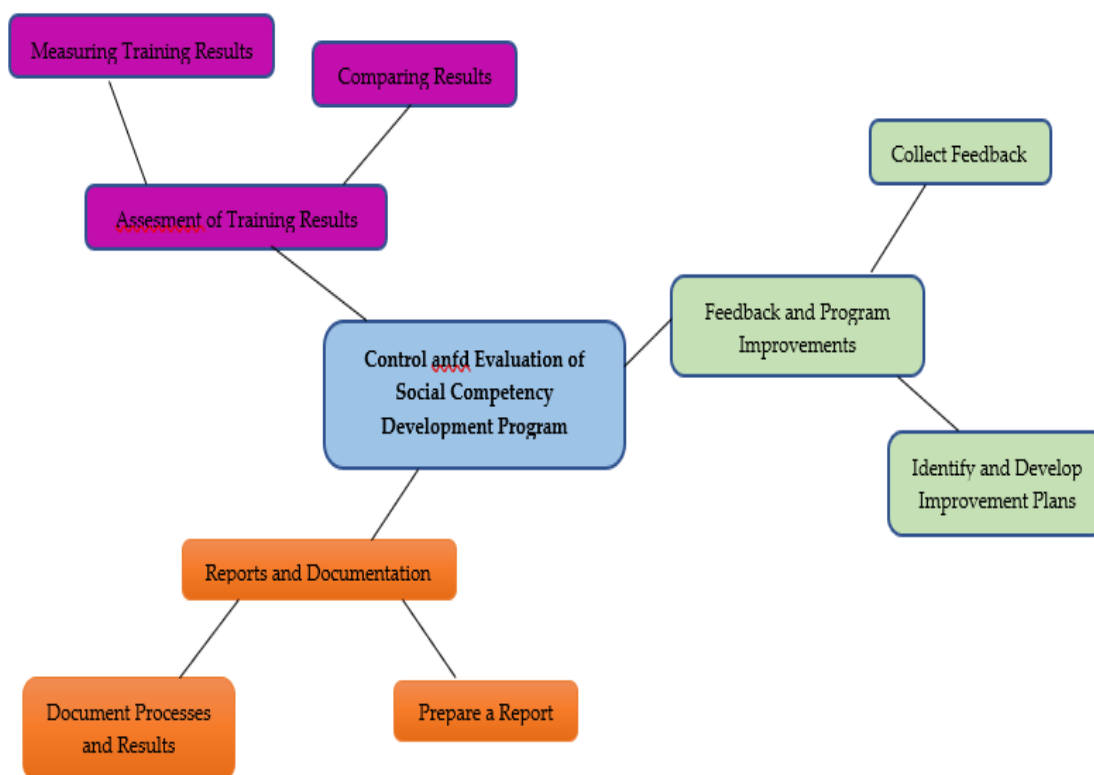
Figure 4. Control and Evaluation of Social Competency Development Programs

This statement can be understood to mean that the Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School has encouraged and organized numerous technology and social media training sessions, and is responsible for its teachers, promoting the positive use of technology in learning and social interaction. They encourage collaboration between teachers to develop learning materials that are integrated with technology, as well as implement a project-based learning approach to strengthen students' collaborative skills. This Islamic boarding school also monitors students' online activities and guides positive interactions in the digital world. With their interactive online learning platform, they facilitate collaborative learning and build inclusive learning communities. This effort aims to develop the social competence of teachers in facing the challenges and opportunities of the digital era, with one of the Teaching staff members, Ustadz Jenal Mutakin, who plays a crucial role in the rukyat reckoning training.
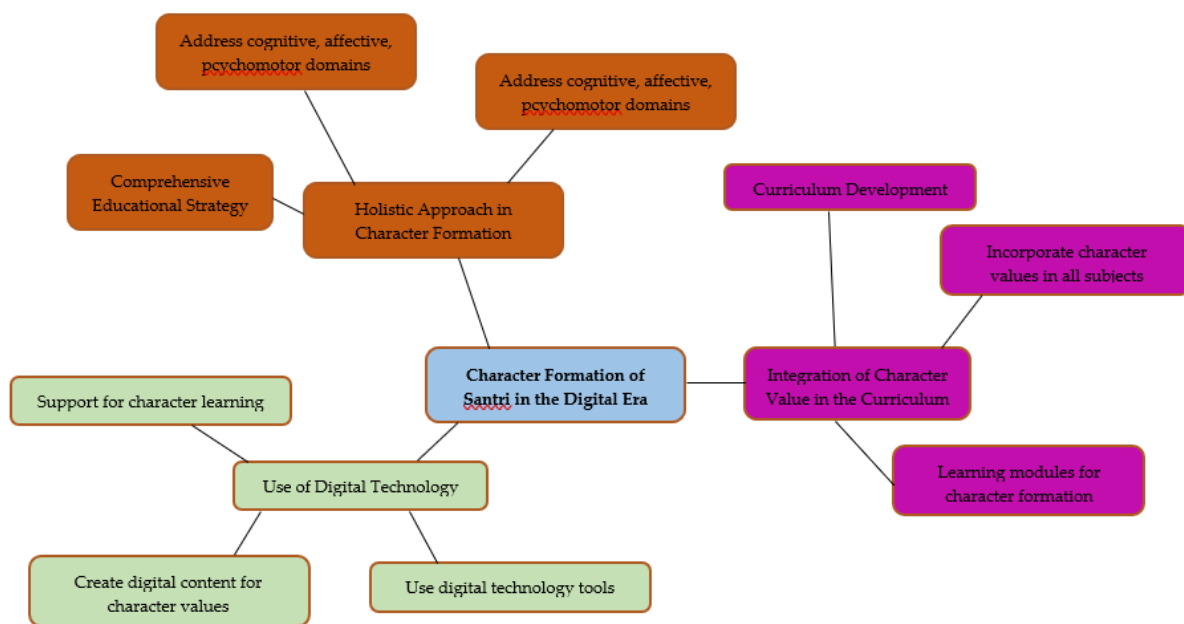
Figure 5. Character Formation of Santri in the Digital Era

Furthermore, according to *Kiai* Asep Hilman Hasanudin, regarding other strategies for improving teachers' social competence that the Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School can carry out, "In my opinion, as a boarding school leader, the strategy for improving teachers' social competence that the Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School can carry out is to involve community members actively. We will hold collaborative programs between boarding school teachers and the surrounding community, such as workshops or joint training sessions, to enhance teachers' social skills in interacting with the community. "Through this collaboration, we believe we can strengthen the relationship between Islamic boarding schools and the community and increase teachers' social competence in an inclusive context of togetherness. And also often invites boarding school teachers and local community members to eat together after routine monthly recitations to strengthen ties between the boarding school management and residents."

This statement highlights the importance of actively engaging community members as a strategy to enhance the social competence of teachers at the Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School. In this effort, Islamic boarding schools will organize collaborative programs between boarding school teachers and the surrounding community, such as workshops or joint training. This step aims not only to enhance teachers' social skills in interacting with the community, but also to strengthen the relationships between Islamic boarding schools and their surrounding environment. By hosting collaborative platforms, such as workshops and joint training sessions, teachers will have the opportunity to interact directly with community members, exchange knowledge, and deepen their understanding of local social realities. Through this collaboration, KH. Asep Hilman Hasanudin believes that the relationship between Islamic boarding schools and society can be strengthened in the context of inclusive togetherness, creating a harmonious and mutually supportive environment between the two entities.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a detailed understanding of how social competencies among teachers at Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School are developed, as well as their crucial role in shaping students' character in the digital era. The importance of social competence is underscored as it significantly affects teacher-student interactions and the moral and social development of students. A key finding indicates that teachers at Al-Khoir exemplify strong role modeling abilities essential dimension of social competence. Their demonstration of empathy, respect, and integrity aligns with Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence, which posits that personal competencies can greatly

impact interpersonal relationships and social influence (Mubarok & Imron, 2021). By embodying these behaviors, teachers become vital role models that engender an environment conducive to internalizing values, subsequently influencing students' character development. This observation supports Lickona's theory of character education, which emphasizes the pivotal role teachers play as moral exemplars in students' lives, shaping not only their acquired knowledge but also their ethical and moral frameworks (Khoiruddin & Masrukin, 2022). In Al-Khoir's context, teachers actively live out the moral principles they intend to impart, thereby effectively fostering character development beyond the classroom through daily interactions that promote mutual respect and empathy (Fatul et al., 2024). This has been corroborated by similar findings in diverse educational contexts, which assert that supportive communication among educators and students plays a vital role in character education (Komarodin & Rofiq, 2023).

Despite these strong competencies in social interactions, the study reveals a significant weakness in digital literacy among teachers at Al-Khoir. The underdevelopment of this competency can be traced to several interconnected factors, with the *pesantren*'s cultural context being a particularly influential element. Historically, *pesantren* have emphasized traditional religious education over the assimilation of modern technology in their pedagogical practices. This cultural foundation, prioritizing spiritual and moral development, has contributed to a hesitance to integrate technology (Wahyuni & Ikawati, 2023). The findings resonate with arguments posited by Khardi et al. (2020), which highlight resistance in traditional educational institutions toward technology due to potential conflicts with established values. Within Al-Khoir, this resistance underscores the reluctance to prioritize digital skills alongside religious teachings, creating a divide where educators feel ill-equipped to engage in contemporary technological pedagogies. Additionally, the study addresses how limited resources exacerbate the teachers' digital literacy challenges. Teachers at Al-Khoir encounter significant obstacles stemming from insufficient access to technological tools and infrastructure, such as computers and reliable internet connectivity. This scarcity hampers their ability to master digital competencies. It restricts their capacity to implement technology effectively in educational practices (Rizal et al., 2023). As Kadri (2022) notes, the development of digital literacy in educators necessitates adequate technological resources, which remain scarce in the *pesantren* setting, thereby impeding holistic educational development.

Leadership within the *pesantren* also significantly influences the trajectory of digital integration. The conservative leadership at Al-Khoir has traditionally prioritized religious education and conventional teaching methods, thereby neglecting the development of digital competency (Rahma et al., 2022). (2020) argue that leadership style profoundly affects the pace of technological innovation adoption within educational institutions. Thus, the conservative leadership's preference for preserving traditional values leads to slower adoption of digital literacy initiatives, leaving teachers underprepared for digital engagement in contemporary educational contexts. Despite these hurdles, the study highlights that teachers at Al-Khoir continue to foster character development effectively through their role modeling and personal engagement with students. This supports Lickona's assertion that students' moral growth is heavily influenced by the virtues displayed by their teachers (Khoiruddin & Masrukin, 2022). This is indicative of the idea that character education is fundamentally rooted in human interactions rather than the exclusive use of digital tools, suggesting that while technology is critical, the human element, visible in teachers' actions, remains central to the efficacy of character education (Fatul et al., 2024). Moreover, the increasing prevalence of digital technology outside of the *pesantren* introduces a potential disconnect between the moral education conveyed within its walls and the digital realities students navigate daily. Muzakky Mahmuudy, R., & Faristiana, A. R. (2023) Emphasize the necessity for educators to serve not only as moral tutors but also as guides in ethical digital interactions. The noted lack of digital competency among educators restricts their ability to navigate and address the ethical challenges accompanying students' engagement with technology outside of the educational environment. Thus, the dichotomy between the values taught at Al-Khoir and students' online experiences presents a significant challenge to their holistic character development in the digital era.

The insights derived from this study significantly contribute to the discourse surrounding teacher social competence, character education, and digital literacy, particularly within Islamic educational frameworks. It illustrates the pressing need for integrating digital literacy into teacher development initiatives focused on promoting moral character in *pesantren* (Rizal et al., 2023). Assert that effective teacher training should encompass both socio-emotional learning and digital skills, suggesting a need for a synergistic approach in professional development (Fahmi et al., 2022). To equip teachers for the complexities of the digital landscape, it is essential to integrate these competencies into training programs, thereby preparing educators to instill in students both moral and digital literacy skills that are indispensable in contemporary society. The findings advocate for a reevaluation of character education within *pesantren*, suggesting that ethical teaching should extend beyond traditional religious content to encompass the skills necessary for navigating a digitalized world responsibly. Lickona's framework supports this, indicating that character education should blend ethical knowledge with practical competencies (Halim Purnomo et al., 2024; Herawati Jalaludin, Muhammadun, Widiantari, & Karim, 2023; Khoiruddin & Masrukin, 2022; Ropitasari et al., 2024). Therefore, incorporating digital literacy as a critical component could ensure comprehensive moral education that adequately prepares students to confront ethical dilemmas presented by modern technology.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study acknowledges pertinent limitations; primarily, it is confined to a single *pesantren*, which may not reflect broader trends across diverse Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Variations in educational practices, leadership dynamics, and access to resources can substantially influence the development of social and digital competencies. Future research endeavors should encompass multiple *pesantren*, fostering a more nuanced understanding of these competencies across different contexts (Fikriyah et al., 2021; Laila et al., 2023; Widiantari et al., 2022). Furthermore, the study primarily explores teachers' perspectives; therefore, insights from students regarding the impact of educators' social competencies on personal character development would add depth to the findings. An examination of how students perceive digital tool integration and its influence on character formation could yield valuable insights for educator practices (Kadri, 2022; Meilana et al., 2024; Rosyad et al., 2025). Lastly, the roles of parents and the community in supporting teacher development warrant exploration. Research by Suharsongko et al. highlights the critical importance of community collaboration in enriching teachers' social and digital skills. Future studies should investigate how partnerships between *pesantren*, families, and local communities can enhance educators' competencies and, by extension, student outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the development of social competencies among teachers at Al-Khoir Islamic Boarding School and their role in shaping students' character in the digital era. The key findings show that while the teachers excel in role modeling as part of their social competence, they face challenges in digital literacy. Teachers at Al-Khoir serve as moral exemplars, strongly influencing students' character development through emotional intelligence and personal example. However, the limited integration of digital tools into their teaching practices highlights a gap in the development of digital literacy. Cultural factors, the conservative leadership style at the *pesantren*, and limited technological resources influence this weakness. The research contributes to Islamic education by linking social competence with character education in the context of the digital age, an area that has not been sufficiently explored in previous studies. It highlights the importance of developing both social and digital competencies among teachers to navigate the challenges of modern education effectively. Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including its focus on only one *pesantren*, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, it mainly focused on teachers' perspectives, neglecting students' views and the role of the community in supporting teachers' professional development. Future research should

expand to include more *pesantren*, incorporating students' perspectives on character development, and exploring the role of community involvement. It would also benefit from a closer examination of how digital literacy affects students' social relationships and moral development, thereby further broadening our understanding of character education in the digital era.

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