

## Carl Rogers' Humanistic Approach in Character Education in Pesantren

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Carl Rogers;  
Character education;  
Humanistic approach;  
Pesantren;  
Social change.

#### DOI:

#### Article History:

Submitted: 10-02-2025

Revised: 20-02-2025

Accepted: 10-03-2025

Published online: 05-04-2025

#### Published by:

Mahkota Science Publishers

### ABSTRACT

*This study seeks to raise collective awareness that effective character education cannot be achieved solely through verbalistic and indoctrinative instilling of values. Still, it requires emotional involvement, psychological sensitivity, and authentic relationships between educators and students as idealised by Rogers. This study uses a library research-based qualitative approach that thoroughly examines the literature related to Carl Rogers' thinking, humanistic education theory, and various academic works discussing character education in Pesantren. The results clearly state that character education in Pesantren still faces challenges in providing space for personal experiences and critical reflection among students, despite its success in building a disciplined and strong community. Carl Rogers' humanistic approach is relevant as a constructive offer because it emphasises the importance of freedom, authentic experiences, and the conscious internalisation of values. If integrated reflectively without abandoning traditional roots, it can enrich the pesantren character education model and produce a generation of santri who are obedient but also adaptive, critical, and ready to become agents of social change.*

## A. Introduction

With all its uniqueness, Pesantren has often been associated with a highly normative, hierarchical institution emphasising the top-down instillation of values (Nilan, 2009). The relationship between *kiai*, *ustadz*, and *santri* is usually portrayed as one characterised by authority, where the authority of the *kiai* is often the primary source of moral legitimacy and knowledge. However, in everyday practice, pesantren's life also reveals warmth, togetherness, and personal closeness between educators and students, valuable social capital for character building (Karimullah et al., 2023). It is precisely in the midst of this strong culture of collectivism that Rogers' humanistic approach finds its relevance, as it does not deny the importance of community, but at the same time affirms the dignity, uniqueness, and personal freedom of each individual in the educational process. Rogers rejects the concept of education that merely produces obedient humans without awareness, and instead encourages the emergence of autonomous, creative, and responsible individuals (van den Akker, 2019).

The big question is, to what extent can Pesantren, as educational institutions steeped in tradition and religious authority, adopt and even transform Rogers' humanistic values into character education practices? Can pesantren build a space for dialogue and openness, free students from the fear of making mistakes, and create an empathetic and non-dominant learning atmosphere as envisioned by Rogers? Or are humanistic values considered foreign and even counterproductive to the ethos of pesantren, which is steeped in obedience to tradition and authority figures? The answers to these questions are undoubtedly complex, as on one hand, pesantren possess a wealth of pedagogical traditions that have withstood the test of time. On the other hand, the demands of character education transformation in the modern era require openness to new approaches more responsive to students' psychological and sociological developments.

Carl Rogers developed humanistic theory based on the premise that every individual has the potential for self-actualisation, which is an inherent drive to develop oneself optimally, becoming an authentic and meaningful person (Nelson et al., 2014; Sargeant & Yoxall, 2023). This process can only occur if the individual is accepting, open, and empathetic. Rogers (1963) introduced the concept of the 'fully functioning person,' which is a person who is free, open to experience, confident, and able to make decisions independently. Rogers was highly critical of traditional educational models, emphasising control, assessment, and competition in education. He believed such models stifle creativity, initiative, and students' dignity. Instead, he proposed an approach that places students as active learning subjects, giving them freedom to express themselves and space to explore their interests and talents without pressure to meet external expectations.

The relevance of Rogers' ideas in character education in Pesantren is crucial, given that the current character crisis in Indonesia often stems from an education system that fails to recognise and nurture the potential and uniqueness of individual students. Amidst the tide of globalisation and the increasingly massive penetration of popular culture, the biggest challenge for Pesantren is how to remain relevant as institutions for character building, not only in a normative sense, but also in a transformative sense. Humanistic character education, as proposed by Rogers, requires recognition of students' diversity of life experiences, backgrounds, and psychological needs. Pesantren, often perceived as closed to criticism and innovation, can become fertile social laboratories for the growth of authentic character if they can creatively adopt a humanistic approach.

Integrating a humanistic approach into pesantren character education should not be understood as an attempt to negate tradition or weaken religious authority (Mujahid, 2021). On the contrary, this approach can be a middle ground for reconstructing the relationship between authority and autonomy, obedience and creativity, tradition and innovation. Visionary pesantren will dare to critically reflect on existing pedagogical practices, evaluating which are still relevant, which need to be adapted, and even which should be abandoned

because they are no longer in line with the psychological development needs of students in the contemporary era. This critical reflection is the spirit of the humanistic approach: building awareness of the importance of freedom, respect, and compassion in character-building.

One of the most fundamental aspects of Rogers' approach relevant to pesantren is the principle of 'unconditional positive regard', an attitude of unconditional acceptance towards students. In the context of pesantren, this means that santri are accepted and valued as human beings, regardless of their shortcomings, failures, or differences. This attitude of acceptance is an important foundation for the growth of self-confidence, a sense of security, and intrinsic motivation in learning. Pesantrens that can apply this principle will create an inclusive atmosphere where santri are not afraid to make mistakes, dare to ask questions, and grow as authentic individuals (Haryanto et al., 2024). Furthermore, Rogers' approach requires educators to be empathetic, feel and understand the inner world of santri, and build warm and genuine personal relationships. Empathy in the educator-santri relationship is not merely a formality, but a quality of relationship that can transform the learning atmosphere into a liberating transformational experience.

Previous studies have made important contributions to the discourse on integrating the humanistic approach, particularly the thoughts of Carl Rogers, in character education practices, both in the context of general education and Pesantren in Indonesia. These findings enrich the body of knowledge and offer theoretical foundations and empirical evidence that can be utilised to formulate effective implementation strategies, while also serving as a solid argumentative basis for this study. A study by Trinh et al. (2021) highlights that learning strategies that emphasise unconditional acceptance, empathy, and appreciation of students' uniqueness can create a more participatory and conducive learning environment and encourage the development of more independent and responsible character traits in students.

Another study conducted by Anjani et al. (2024) explores that a humanistic approach, when applied in individual and group counselling services in Pesantren, can reduce aggressive behaviour, increase self-confidence, and foster reflective awareness in resolving personal conflicts. Meanwhile, several studies have confirmed that even in the highly traditional culture of pesantren, there is room for humanistic pedagogical practices without necessarily declaring collaboration between traditional pesantren values and humanistic approaches. This collaboration can create a character education model that is adaptive to changing times and remains steadfast in preserving identity and local wisdom (Ma' Arif, 2018; Musthofa et al., 2025; Putro & Suryono, 2019).

Based on these findings, this study is oriented towards filling the gaps and answering the profound questions that previous studies have not fully answered. The primary objective of this study is to identify, describe, and critically analyse how Carl Rogers' humanistic approach can be integrated into character education in Indonesian pesantren, highlighting supporting factors, obstacles, and implications for the transformation of pesantren educational culture. The essence of this study is to offer a new integrative and transformative paradigm for character education in pesantren. This study does not merely adopt Rogers' humanistic theory verbatim, but seeks to contextualise and engage in creative dialogue between the spirit of humanism and the values of pesantren traditions. Thus, it is hoped that a character education model will emerge that not only shapes individuals with noble character and obedience to tradition but also possesses autonomy, empathy, reflective ability, and high resilience in facing the challenges of the times.

## **B. Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach based on library research that thoroughly examines key literature related to Carl Rogers' thinking, humanistic education theory, and various academic works discussing character education in Indonesian Pesantren. This approach was chosen to enable a comprehensive and reflective theoretical exploration of the

relevance, challenges, and opportunities for applying humanistic principles in character education within the pesantren environment. By analysing and comparing various scientific sources, this study seeks to construct a critical synthesis of how humanistic theory, particularly Rogers' ideas of unconditional acceptance, empathy, and authenticity in educator-student relationships, can be integrated into a character education framework that is consistent with the values and traditions of pesantren. The analysis was conducted on key concepts and character education practices developed in Pesantren, through journal reviews, books, and curriculum documents, resulting in a comprehensive and relevant discourse mapping in line with contemporary developments.

Theoretically, this study uses Carl Rogers' humanistic theory as the main foundation for analysis (Yin, 2018). Rogers offers an educational paradigm that views individuals as unique beings with the potential for self-actualisation and who can only develop optimally in a supportive and empathetic environment. The three pillars of Rogers' theory – unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence – are critically examined in the context of the philosophy of character education in pesantren. To strengthen the analytical framework, this study also reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of education (Elliott & Davis, 2018), highlighting the importance of interactions between various social and cultural systems in shaping individual character. Through a conceptual approach and literature synthesis, this study aims to provide a sharp and reflective understanding of the possibilities and consequences of integrating a humanistic approach into character education in pesantren, as well as offering a new theoretical foundation for developing more humanistic, adaptive, and relevant character education strategies in line with the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian society.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

#### **1. Traditional Authority in Pesantren and Individual Freedom in Educational Institutions**

Amidst the rapid flow of globalisation and modernisation, various criticisms have been directed at educational institutions incapable of providing space for individual freedom, critical reflection, and open dialogue. It is not uncommon for Pesantren to be accused of being overly conservative, authoritarian, and lacking space for students to actualise themselves (Othman, 2003). These criticisms stem from concerns that education that overly emphasises authority and obedience can produce a passive generation that is less innovative and tends to accept dogma without the ability to reflect, criticise, and develop their ideas. Rogers' humanistic thinking becomes relevant in this context and needs to be elaborated and contextualised.

Rogers offers an educational approach that places freedom, self-actualisation, and egalitarian relationships at the core of the learning process. He believes that every individual has the potential to grow and develop optimally if given the space to express themselves, make autonomous decisions, and engage in mutually respectful relationships. However, the big question is, to what extent can Rogers' values of freedom, self-reflection, and open dialogue be integrated into the pesantren culture, which tends to be hierarchical and authoritative? Is it possible to create space for dialogue and liberty within an established social structure, where the voice of the *kiai* tends to be the sole reference point and obedience is considered the primary quality of a *santri*? To answer this question, an analysis that is not simplistic and does not merely compare two value systems in an opposed manner is needed. Instead, exploring the creative possibilities of integration, negotiation, and reconciliation between the two is necessary.

As an educational institution rooted in Islamic tradition, the pesantren possesses a rich treasure trove of values. While obedience to the *kiai* is a defining characteristic, the traditions of criticism, consultation, and *ijtihad* have never entirely disappeared from the intellectual

dynamics of the pesantren. Throughout history, many pesantren *kiai* have emerged as innovators of thought and catalysts for social change, with many teaching the importance of critical thinking and daring to hold differing opinions within the bounds of ethics and etiquette. The tradition of studying classical Islamic texts, for example, does not merely require memorisation but also deep understanding and the ability to analyse differing opinions among classical scholars. In these study circles, students are encouraged to ask questions, seek clarification, and express their views within proper etiquette. This phenomenon indicates that intellectual freedom is not absent from pesantren culture, though it remains within the strong authority and tradition framework.

On the other hand, Rogers' humanistic approach, which emphasises individual freedom, self-actualisation, and egalitarian relationships, is rooted in respect for human dignity. Rogers observed that overly dominant and rigid authority in education can stifle creativity, suppress the potential for self-actualisation, and create superficial relationships between teachers and students. In such relationships, students tend to be passive, waiting for instructions, and lacking intrinsic motivation to develop. Rogers asserts that successful education can arouse internal motivation in students, provide space for authentic personality growth, and build equal relationships between educators and students.

When Rogers' values are directly confronted with pesantren culture, a significant gap becomes evident between the two paradigms. On one hand, pesantren emphasises obedience as the primary means of transmitting values and knowledge (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022); on the other hand, Rogers emphasises freedom as the primary condition for personal development. However, upon closer examination, there are potential intersections that can serve as entry points to enrich educational practices in pesantren. One key lies in reinterpreting the concept of authority itself. Authority does not necessarily mean absolute domination that closes the space for freedom, but can be reconstructed as authority that guides, directs, and facilitates the growth of students' independence. *Kiai* or teachers are not only sources of truth but also facilitators who create a safe space for dialogue, reflection, and critical learning.

In everyday educational practices in pesantren, the relationship between *kiai* and santri is very fluid and warm. However, strict boundaries and etiquette still mark it – the present. The *Kiai* as a role model often functions more as a moral example than a formal authority. This exemplary behaviour fosters voluntary respect and loyalty among students, not merely due to coercion. The emotional bond between the *kiai* and students often creates a family-like atmosphere, where values such as love, care, and empathy flow naturally (Karimullah, 2023c). In this context, Rogers' humanistic principle of the importance of empathetic and unconditional acceptance is equivalent to the pesantren tradition. However, it may not be explicitly formulated as part of educational theory.

The biggest obstacle to applying Rogers' humanistic values in pesantren lies in individual freedom and self-actualisation, which are often interpreted as conflicting with the demands of collectivism and obedience in pesantren. If not understood correctly, personal freedom can be seen as a threat to the pesantren's collective harmony and social cohesion. However, at the same time, overemphasising collectivity without room for self-actualisation can lead to other problems: stagnation of creativity, stagnation of thought, and loss of innovation. Therefore, the biggest challenge for pesantren today is balancing traditional authority and individual freedom, obedience and creativity, and tradition and innovation. From Rogers' perspective, freedom does not mean anarchy or liberation from norms, but rather responsible freedom, accompanied by the ability to reflect on life choices consciously.

Although seemingly contrary to hierarchical traditions, Rogers' open dialogue can be adapted in contextual and appropriate forms to the culture of pesantren. Dialogue does not mean eliminating authority, but opening space for santri to voice their aspirations, ideas, and concerns without fear of punishment or stigma. Dialogue also serves as a means for *kiai* and teachers to understand better the needs, potential, and challenges santri face, thereby making

the educational process more personal, relevant, and transformative. Pesantren that adopt the principle of dialogue within the bounds of ethics and tradition will produce santri who are not only obedient but also critical, reflective, and ready to become leaders in the future.

As a value-based educational institution, pesantren has strong social capital to build a humanistic and inclusive learning community. The spirit of collectivity, togetherness, and solidarity built in pesantren is fertile ground for instilling the values of humanity, compassion, and empathy as idealised by Rogers. However, this spirit must continue to be developed by providing space for freedom of thought, opportunities for experimentation, and challenging and meaningful learning experiences. The self-actualisation of santri must be viewed as an integral part of the educational process, not a threat to authority. In this regard, the role of *kiai* and teachers shifts from mere controllers to motivators, guides, and partners in the growth and development of santri.

The application of Rogers' humanistic values in pesantren can also be seen from the psychological aspect of individual development. Adolescence and early adulthood, the main phases of a santri's life, are crucial periods of identity search, self-formation, and exploration of the meaning of life. If educational institutions do not provide space for self-reflection, dialogue, and self-actualisation, the potential for internal conflict, dissatisfaction, and even resistance to pesantren values will increase. Conversely, if santri feel heard, valued, and given space to express themselves, their loyalty to the pesantren will grow stronger and more voluntary, rather than merely formal or forced.

Indonesia's social, cultural, and broader societal context greatly influences the dynamics between traditional authority and individual freedom in pesantren. An increasingly pluralistic, open, and dynamic society demands that educational institutions, including pesantren, be more adaptive and innovative in developing learning strategies. If pesantren become too rigid and closed to change, they risk being abandoned by young people who crave freedom, creativity, and relevance. However, if pesantren become too immersed in liberalism and lose their traditional roots, their identity as a moral bastion of the nation will also be threatened.

Efforts to integrate Rogers' humanistic values into pesantren do not mean negating the importance of authority and tradition, but rather restructuring the relationship between educators and students to be more dialogical, empathetic, and liberating. *Kiai* remain moral role models and sources of scientific legitimacy. Still, they must also be good listeners, facilitators of potential development, and guides in self-reflection for santri. On the other hand, students are not merely objects of indoctrination but active, critical learning subjects responsible for their self-actualisation. This process is certainly not easy and requires a paradigm shift at the institutional and personal levels.

Resistance to change often arises from concerns about the erosion of the authority of the *kiai*, the weakening of discipline, or the emergence of individualistic behaviour that disrupts community harmony. These concerns are valid but can be addressed if the integration process is carried out carefully, gradually, and based on sincere dialogue between all elements of the pesantren. Strengthening pesantren's core values, such as humility, sincerity, and brotherhood, must remain the foundation. At the same time, freedom and self-actualisation are given space within social responsibility and Islamic manners. By opening a space of reflective liberty, pesantren can produce a better-prepared generation to face the complexities of the modern world without losing its Islamic and Indonesian identity.

Lessons from various character education experiments in pesantren show that students given space to dialogue, express their opinions, and participate in decision-making tend to have a higher sense of responsibility, stronger motivation to learn, and better adaptability (Karimullah, 2023b). Some progressive pesantren have begun to develop collaborative learning models, group discussions, and leadership training that require active student

participation (Mahrus & Karimullah, 2022). If widely developed, such innovations will accelerate the transformation toward a more humanistic and relevant pesantren education.

The application of a humanistic approach in pesantren can also be strengthened by wisely utilising information technology and social media. Santri, as the digital generation, are accustomed to living amid a flood of information, cross-cultural dialogue, and unlimited access to knowledge. Pesantren must respond to this reality by opening healthy dialogue spaces, guiding santri to sort and reflect on information, and building a critical and responsible digital literacy culture. In this context, Rogers' freedom of expression and self-reflection principles can be implemented through new media familiar to santri, as long as they remain within the corridor of pesantren ethics and values. The relationship between traditional pesantren authority and individual freedom in education in Indonesia does not have to be positioned antagonistically, but creative and transformative common ground can be sought.

Pesantren, Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institution, possesses remarkable resilience, flexibility, and a wealth of tradition to respond to changing times. Integrating Rogers' humanistic values is not merely an option but a strategic necessity to ensure that pesantren remain relevant and capable of producing generations with strong character, adaptability, and vision. By developing liberating authority, building authentic spaces for dialogue, and encouraging self-actualisation among students, pesantren can become laboratories of civilisation that preserve tradition and pave the way for a more inclusive, humanistic, and transformative future of education (Karimullah, 2022).

The path toward this transformation is certainly not easy and is filled with challenges, but history has proven that pesantren have always been able to adapt without losing their identity. The challenges of globalisation, digitalisation, and pluralism of values have become a golden opportunity for pesantren to solidify their position as centres for nation-building, not merely teaching obedience but also fostering responsible freedom, empathy, and critical reflection. Thus, Rogers' vision of humanistic education to humanise humanity can find its most contextual and meaningful form in the Indonesian pesantren, without abandoning the traditional roots that have been its essence for centuries.

## **2. Character Education Based on Personal Experience of Santri**

The reality of pesantren education, which is still dominated by memorisation and formal discipline, is often praised as an effort to preserve authentic Islamic scholarship and instil obedience to rules and authority. This model is fundamentally effective in creating a solid community, maintaining the continuity of classical knowledge transmission, and building a structured social habitus. However, from a deeper and more transformative perspective on character education, this model raises several critical questions. Can we be sure that students who can memorise thousands of verses or dozens of classical texts have truly internalised the noble values contained within them? Is the discipline and obedience demonstrated over the years in pesantren born out of personal awareness and deep reflection, or is it merely the result of mechanistic structural obedience? Perhaps pesantren graduates have only been formally 'obedient' but not yet fully 'characterised' in Rogers' sense, emphasising self-awareness, moral autonomy, and authenticity of intention in behaviour.

Such criticism is not intended to deny the merits of the pesantren educational tradition, but rather as a reflective effort to reorient the focus and methods of character education in pesantren to make them more relevant to the needs of holistic human development (Karimullah, 2021b). Memorisation remains important as a means of preserving knowledge and training memory, but when memorisation becomes the primary goal, the process of internalising values and personal experiences of students risks being marginalised. Pesantren must dare to shift the focus of character education from mere cognitive achievement to instilling values through authentic experiences and deep self-reflection. Internalisation—or the process of personal and voluntary appreciation of values—is a prerequisite for the

emergence of individuals with true character, not merely formally obedient individuals (Karimullah, 2021a).

In Rogers' perspective, the internalisation of values is a process in which individuals actively, consciously, and reflectively accept and instil certain values as an integral part of their personality and belief system. This process cannot be forced from outside but must grow from within the individual due to life experiences, inner dialogue, and existential encounters with reality. In the context of pesantren, opportunities to strengthen the process of internalising values are very broad, given that the pesantren environment is essentially a living, dynamic community rich in collective experience. However, an educational approach that overly emphasises memorisation, discipline, and obedience without reflection can hinder this internalisation process (Karimullah et al., 2025; Wati et al., 2022). Students may become proficient in memorisation, accustomed to religious routines, and disciplined in following rules. Still, without personal experience and space for reflection, the noble values taught risk becoming empty routines devoid of moral transformative power.

Character education based on the personal experiences of santri requires fundamental changes in the approach and strategies of learning in pesantren (Karimullah et al., 2022). The educational process must begin to provide sufficient space for Santri to actively explore values, discuss meaning, and reflect on their daily experiences. Learning activities should consist of rote memorisation, case studies, social projects, experience sharing, and open dialogue on current issues faced by santri. Educators in pesantren need to transform themselves into facilitators of santri's self-actualisation, not merely guardians of tradition and compliance supervisors. Educators must build warm, empathetic, authentic relationships with students and provide space for differences in expression, interpretation, and independent problem solving.

The importance of personal experience in character building is relevant to responding to the challenges of the times and in line with the spirit of Islam, which places humans as free, responsible subjects capable of choosing their path in life. In Islamic teachings, every individual is honoured for their ability to strive, think critically, and take responsibility for their choices (Sugitanata et al., 2024). The teachings of muhasabah (self-introspection) and ijtihad (earnest effort in understanding teachings) are clear examples of Islam's high value of internalising values based on reflection and personal experience.

Thus, shifting the focus of character education in Pesantren from memorisation to internalisation of values does not mean rejecting Islamic traditions but reviving Islam's dynamic, reflective, and humanising spirit. Rogers believed meaningful education can only be achieved if individuals experience the values taught personally and authentically. He refers to this process as experiential learning, which does not stop at the cognitive level but extends into the affective and psychomotor domains. In this model, values are no longer understood as dogmas that must be obeyed unconditionally but as part of life that is experienced, felt, and internalised voluntarily by individuals. Pesantren that can develop a personal experience-based learning model will produce santri who are not only academically intelligent, but also emotionally and spiritually mature. Santri like this will grow into individuals who are resilient, adaptive, and able to face life's challenges with a well-rounded and consistent personality.

One of the biggest challenges in shifting the focus of pesantren character education is resistance to change from educators, administrators, and the santri. Traditions deeply rooted for centuries are often seen as sacrosanct and untouchable. Memorisation is considered the benchmark of educational success, and formal obedience is the primary symbol of character development. However, the reality of life after boarding school often reveals that many graduates struggle to cope with social, emotional, and moral issues in the real world (Suwarni et al., 2024). The currents of change easily sway them, make it difficult for them to make independent decisions, and often cause them to be trapped in superficial, formalistic

behaviour. This phenomenon should serve as a wake-up call for all parties that character education cannot stop at memorisation and formal obedience. Still, it must be encouraged towards a process of personal and reflective internalisation of values.

Internalising values requires a supportive, open, and empathetic educational environment. Pesantren must create a psychosocial climate that allows santri to ask questions, discuss, and critically question the values taught. In Rogers' view, educators must create an unconditionally accepting, empathetic, and authentic environment in student relationships. Such relationships allow santri to feel safe expressing themselves, sharing experiences, and developing moral understanding independently. A repressive learning environment that closes the space for discussion and demands too much obedience will kill creativity, suppress the potential for self-actualisation, and hinder the process of internalising values.

Character education based on the personal experiences of santri also requires space for failure, mistakes, and a learning process that is not always smooth (Auliyah et al., 2025). Internalisation cannot be forced instantly, but is a long process full of twists and turns and dialectics between the values held and real-life experiences. Students must be allowed to try, fail, learn from experience, and grow into resilient individuals. In this context, educators must be able to accompany the learning process without easily judging, imposing counterproductive punishments, or ignoring the psychological needs of students.

As community-based educational institutions, pesantren have great potential to develop character education models based on personal experience. The daily life in pesantren, rich in social interaction, collective worship, and dormitory dynamics, is a real laboratory for learning values. However, habit alone will not result in the internalisation of values if a process of reflection, dialogue, and personal appreciation does not accompany it. Activities such as deliberation, sharing sessions, mentoring, and student involvement in community social activities can be effective vehicles for strengthening the process of authentic value internalisation.

The phenomenon that pesantren graduates are often identified as obedient and religious individuals is not entirely incorrect, but the quality of value internalisation behind this formal obedience needs further examination. Do they genuinely understand, internalise, and practise the values they have learned personally, or are they merely following routines due to systemic demands? True character education can only emerge from individuals who reflect on their life experiences, draw lessons from every event, and instill universal values into their belief systems and daily behaviour. As institutions that are very strong in shaping religious habits, Pesantren must dare to go beyond formal achievements to develop a deeper, more reflective, and authentic character.

A change in the mindset of educators must also support the paradigm shift in character education in pesantren. Educators are no longer sufficient to act as masters of subject matter and supervisors of memorisation; they must become inspirers, motivators, and facilitators of the personal growth and development of santri. Educators must set an example not of their mastery of knowledge but of their way of life, thinking, and solving problems (Jiang & Pang, 2023). This example will become a powerful personal experience for students because they learn from what is taught and what they experience, feel, and witness firsthand in their daily interactions. Character education based on students' experiences is also relevant in building resilience, leadership, and adaptability amid rapid and challenging changes.

Students accustomed to experiencing, reflecting on, and internalising values on a personal level will be better prepared to face the complexities of life outside the pesantren (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024). They will become individuals who are formally obedient, emotionally mature, intellectually critical, and spiritually resilient. According to Rogers, this is the ultimate goal of character education: to produce fully human beings, not merely humans who are obedient to the system. Character education in pesantren must continue to transform in line with the times (Karimullah, 2023a). The challenges of globalisation, digitalisation, and

changing social values require pesantren to be more adaptive and innovative in formulating character education strategies. Shifting the focus from memorisation to internalisation of values does not mean abandoning tradition, but rather enriching and deepening the meaning of tradition itself. Character education based on the personal experiences of santri is a middle ground that allows for the integration of the noble values of pesantren with the actual needs of today's young generation. Only in this way can pesantren continue to be the moral bastion of the nation and a laboratory for shaping the character of Indonesians who are whole, reflective, and visionary.

### **3. The Challenge of Integrating Humanistic Values into the Colossal and Collective Tradition of Pesantren**

The encounter between the colossal collectivism of pesantren and Rogers' humanistic ideas emphasising individualisation gives rise to complexities that cannot be simplified into black-and-white logic. On one hand, the collectivity in pesantren has proven to be a very strong social capital in building solidarity, care, and discipline. Students are taught to live together in a community, help one another, and subdue personal ego for the common good. This enables pesantren to build social cohesion, which is rarely found in other educational institutions. However, on the other hand, the demands of the times have brought about a new need for each individual to be given space to develop according to their potential and uniqueness. The world outside pesantren demands adaptive, innovative individuals capable of making independent decisions, not just part of a homogeneous mass.

The potential conflict between individualisation and collectivity in character education practices in pesantren is a central issue that demands critical and reflective elaboration. On one hand, strengthening collective values and togetherness is essential for building a solid community and internalising social norms. However, on the other hand, excessive emphasis on behavioural homogeneity can produce individuals who lose their identity, are afraid to be different, and tend to suppress their potential. Pesantren are often seen as 'successful' in shaping obedient characters. Still, criticism arises when the result is graduates who are not prepared to compete creatively in a society that demands originality of ideas and the courage to take initiative. In this context, Rogers' humanistic approach becomes an intellectual provocation that challenges and offers an alternative path for character education in pesantren.

One of the main challenges in integrating Rogers' humanistic values into the colossal tradition of pesantren is the psychological and cultural resistance from the pesantren community itself. Togetherness, collective discipline, and uniformity of behaviour are considered moral fortresses that must not be compromised. Approaches that allow space for individual expression, open dialogue, and differing opinions are often feared as gateways to 'chaos' or division within the community. Concerns about the emergence of identity fragmentation, the weakening of the authority of religious leaders, and the erosion of santri etiquette are the main arguments against any form of innovation perceived as threatening the established order. However, historically, Pesantren have never been completely immune to change and renewal. Great clerics have often emerged as innovators who reinterpret tradition without losing sight of their collective roots. The integration of Rogers' humanistic values cannot be done sporadically or partially without understanding the cultural roots of Pesantren that have been deeply embedded for centuries.

Every effort at change must be contextual, gradual, and based on deep reflection on the essence of character education. Collectivity in pesantren should not be opposed to the value of individualisation. Instead, spaces for dialogue can be created within a collective framework, where santri are encouraged to discover their uniqueness as part of their social responsibility. Internalising character values does not merely occur through collective indoctrination, but also through personal experiences, self-reflection, and active involvement in community life. Without abandoning their collective identity, Pesantren can draw

inspiration from Rogers' humanistic principles, such as unconditional acceptance and empathy.

One crucial point is the redefinition of the role of kiai and teachers in pesantren. If they have been positioned as sole authorities and controllers of behaviour, then in the humanistic paradigm, they need to appear as mentors, facilitators of growth, and role models for dialogue. Moral authority is maintained with a humanistic touch that fosters a sense of security for santri to explore their potential. *Kiai* can become inspirers who encourage santri to think critically, discuss, and dare to make decisions based on rational considerations and noble values (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). An egalitarian relationship between teachers and students does not mean eliminating respect, but rather fostering an awareness that true authority is built on trust, empathy, and a shared commitment to human growth.

Potential unrest in established pesantren environments will arise when changes in the educational paradigm occur faster than the collective culture is ready to accept them. Humanistic values such as freedom of expression, open dialogue, and self-actualisation are relevant for shaping adaptive modern individuals (Sisko, 2025). However, if implemented carelessly without cultural sensitivity, they can be rejected outright or even give rise to identity confusion among students. This anxiety can be fear of losing togetherness, a sense of directionlessness, or even confusion in determining one's stance between loyalty to the community and self-actualisation.

This situation has occurred in several Pesantren that were too 'progressive' in implementing modern educational methods without instilling adequate collective values. The integration of Rogers' humanistic values into the tradition of Pesantren requires a creative synthesis that is not easy. This synthesis must be able to place the development of individual potential as part of a collective commitment to mutual progress. In this context, the self-actualisation of santri is no longer understood as an effort to separate oneself from the community but as a tangible contribution to enriching the community. The values of togetherness and individualisation do not have to be opposing poles, but can synergise in shaping the authentic, adaptive, and socially conscious character of santri.

This process requires pesantren leaders to navigate change without losing sight of the community's direction and identity. Resistance to humanistic innovation is often reinforced by narratives about the threat of globalisation and Western individualistic culture, which are perceived as eroding the noble values of pesantren (Sagita Krissandi et al., 2023). These concerns are justified, given that many modern educational models have failed to build social cohesion and have produced generations disconnected from their cultural roots. However, not all individualisation values are destructive. Individuals who recognise and develop their full potential will contribute more to the community. Pesantren can learn to distinguish between egoistic individualism and constructive individualisation.

The success of integrating Rogers' humanistic values into the colossal tradition of pesantren depends heavily on the internal dialogue within the community, the openness of leaders to reform, and the readiness of santri to become reflective agents of change. Healthy discussion spaces are needed where every community member can express ideas, critique existing practices, and collectively formulate a new vision for character education (Hart, 2022). The deliberative model that has become a tradition in pesantren can be strengthened with the principles of humanistic dialogue, so that every voice is heard and valued. Openness to criticism, collective reflection, and the ability to adopt new values without abandoning traditional roots are the main keys to this transformation.

The experience of several pesantren that have begun to open space for developing students' interests, talents, and skills outside the formal curriculum demonstrates that change is possible without undermining social cohesion. Several progressive pesantren are adopting extracurricular activities, leadership training, intergenerational discussions, and individual mentoring programmes. As a result, students can demonstrate creativity, leadership, and self-

confidence without losing their spirit of togetherness. Integrating humanistic values does not mean abandoning collective values, but rather adding a new dimension to character education practices that are more holistic and adaptive. However, it must be acknowledged that the greatest challenge remains in changing mindsets and mentalities at both the management and student levels (Karimullah, 2023d).

Openness to differences, willingness to listen, and courage to engage in critical reflection must become part of the new habitus of the pesantren community. Fear of losing the authority of the *kiai* or the breakdown of social structures must not hinder the necessary transformation process. Rather, authority that can adapt and become a model of dialogue will be increasingly respected and influential. In a broader context, integrating Rogers' humanistic values in pesantren also aligns with the national education demand to build an intelligent generation with character and is globally competitive. An education system that is too uniform and suppresses individual freedom has proven unsuccessful in producing innovators, leaders, and social reformers. With their strong social capital and collective traditions, Pesantren have a great opportunity to develop a character education model that combines social solidarity and personal freedom (Musadad et al., 2025). If this transformation succeeds, pesantren can become pioneers in creating Indonesians who balance collective commitment and self-development.

The greatest challenge of integrating humanistic values into pesantren traditions is not technical or methodological, but paradigmatic and cultural. It requires intellectual and moral courage to rethink approaches to character education, negotiate new values without feeling threatened, and build an adaptive community habitus. Such transformation cannot occur overnight but requires a lengthy process, intergenerational dialogue, and the readiness of all pesantren elements to continue learning. Resistance and anxiety are inevitable, but they are signs that the community is moving toward a new phase in its historical journey.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Character education in Indonesian Pesantren, with all the strengths of collective tradition, discipline, and emphasis on obedience, has successfully created solid communities and strong moral identities. However, this model also presents a paradox: limited space for personal experience, critical reflection, and self-actualisation among students, which often becomes a weak point in forming authentic and adaptive character. In this context, Carl Rogers' humanistic approach offers constructive criticism and a way forward. By emphasising the importance of authentic experiences, freedom of expression, and egalitarian relationships, Rogers promotes character education that instils obedience and fosters awareness, independence, and courage among students to take initiative in the face of contemporary challenges.

Implementing Rogers' humanistic values certainly requires cultural readiness and gradual transformation, but it is precisely here that the opportunity for innovation in pesantren character education is moving forward. Suppose these humanistic principles are integrated reflectively and remain rooted in the wisdom of pesantren traditions. In that case, collective identity will be preserved, and a generation of santri with strong character, critical thinking, adaptability, and readiness to become agents of social change will emerge. Rogers' humanistic approach ultimately serves as a bridge uniting the collectivity of tradition and the individual's need for self-actualisation, realising the pesantren as a space for the formation of the complete Indonesian human being, rooted firmly in values and soaring high in humanity and creativity.

#### **E. Acknowledgments**

The authors hereby extend their highest appreciation to the esteemed editors and reviewers whose exceptional expertise, rigorous evaluation, and insightful recommendations

have significantly elevated this research's quality and academic merit. With sincere gratitude, we acknowledge the support and contributions of all individuals and institutions who have facilitated this study in various capacities, including those whose names cannot be individually listed. The unwavering dedication and collaborative efforts of all parties involved have been indispensable to the successful realisation of this scholarly endeavour.

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