

Embedding Ta'awun in Aqidah Akhlak Learning: A Character Education Framework from Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept and implementation of Ta'awun (mutual assistance) in Aqidah Akhlak (Theology and Morals) learning at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor, Padangsidempuan City. Ta'awun as a fundamental Islamic value is considered crucial in shaping the character of students (santri) in a pesantren environment that emphasizes communal life. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and document studies. The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis technique, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The results show that the concept of Ta'awun is comprehensively understood and implemented in real terms in daily life at the pesantren, both in academic activities (such as study assistance), daily activities (such as communal cleaning and duty schedules), and in social interactions both inside and outside the pesantren. This implementation is supported by the boarding system, the exemplary role of the ustadz/ustadzah (teachers), and the integration between theoretical learning in the classroom and direct practice. However, the study also identified several inhibiting factors, such as varying levels of student self-awareness and limitations in supervision time. In conclusion, Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor has successfully made Ta'awun a pillar in forming students' character to be caring, empathetic, and collectively responsible, which aligns with the pesantren's vision to produce clerics who contribute to society.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep dan implementasi Ta'awun (saling tolong-menolong) dalam pembelajaran Aqidah Akhlak di Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor, Kota Padangsidempuan. Ta'awun sebagai nilai fundamental Islam dipandang krusial dalam pembentukan karakter santri di lingkungan pesantren yang mengedepankan kehidupan komunal. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam dengan guru dan santri, serta studi dokumentasi. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis data kualitatif model Miles dan Huberman, yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan/verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsep Ta'awun dipahami secara komprehensif dan diimplementasikan secara nyata dalam kehidupan sehari-hari di pesantren, baik dalam kegiatan akademik (seperti bantuan belajar), kegiatan harian (seperti gotong royong kebersihan dan piket), maupun dalam interaksi sosial di dalam dan luar pesantren. Implementasi ini didukung oleh sistem asrama, keteladanan para ustadz/ustadzah, dan integrasi antara teori pembelajaran di kelas dengan praktik langsung. Meski demikian, penelitian juga mengidentifikasi beberapa faktor penghambat, seperti tingkat kesadaran diri santri yang masih beragam dan keterbatasan waktu pengawasan. Kesimpulannya, Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor telah berhasil menjadikan Ta'awun sebagai pilar dalam membentuk karakter santri yang peduli, empatik, dan bertanggung jawab secara kolektif, yang sejalan dengan visi pesantren untuk mencetak kader ulama yang berkontribusi bagi masyarakat.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are Islamic educational institutions that function not only as centers for the transmission of religious knowledge but also as spaces for the formation of students' character and socio-religious culture (Akmansyah et al., 2025; Arif et al., 2025; Azizah et al., 2025; Baihaqi et al., 2023; Tamsir, 2022). One of the fundamental values that constitutes the spirit of *pesantren* life is *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) (Andriana et al., 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Hakim & Salim, 2024; Hidayatullah, 2024; Inang, 2025; Ismawati, 2023; Muksin & Mudlofir, 2024). *Ta'awun* is not merely interpreted as a social activity, but as a manifestation of Islamic teachings rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith and as an integral part of the formation of collective morality (Haruna, 2025; Kibtiyah, 2025; Mubi et al., 2024; Sabarudin et al., 2023). In the context of contemporary Islamic education, the value of *ta'awun* has become increasingly important due to the emergence of individualism, the decline of social awareness, and the weakening of solidarity among the younger generation (Na et al., 2025). Various phenomena, such as low social empathy, increasing conflicts among students, and the lack of a *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) culture, indicate that strengthening socio-religious values remains an urgent necessity in the field of education (Bahri et al., 2026; Desmiati et al., 2023; Hasan et al., 2024; Saputra, 2022; Syamsi et al., 2024).

Pesantren as a subculture of Islamic education possesses a distinctive value system, one of which is the habituation of living collectively, togetherness, and mutual assistance in daily activities (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024; Ahwan & Karfida, 2025; Budiyo et al., 2024; Fathir, 2026; Hadisi et al., 2025). This is in line with the view of Zamakhsyari Dhofier, who emphasizes that the *pesantren* is not merely an educational institution but also a moral community that shapes the social relations of *santri* through the traditions and culture that live within it. The value of *ta'awun* in *pesantren* life is reflected in various practices such as communal work, group study, helping one another in fulfilling daily needs, and obedience to collective regulations that foster a sense of social responsibility (Raihan, 2025). Thus, *ta'awun* is not only taught normatively but is internalized through the culture of living together (Nasar, 2025).

A number of previous studies have examined *pesantren* as institutions for character building, moral education, and the strengthening of socio-religious values (Nurwahida, 2025). These studies generally highlight the role of *pesantren* in developing students' independence, discipline, and spirituality, as well as character formation through the hidden curriculum of *pesantren* (Rohdiana, 2023). In addition, research on character education in *pesantren* also emphasizes the importance of the *kiai's* exemplary conduct, the dormitory system, and the habituation of congregational worship (Khunaivi et al., 2025). However, studies that specifically construct the concept of *ta'awun* as a core value embedded in *pesantren* culture and analyze its forms, internalization processes, and meanings in the lives of *santri* are still relatively limited (Maghrobi & Iqbal, 2024). Existing research tends to discuss *ta'awun* as a small part of social moral values and has not yet positioned it as the main focus within the conceptual and practical framework of *pesantren* life. This constitutes the research gap that underlies the importance of this study (Mawaddah, 2025).

Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ansor, as one of the Islamic educational institutions that integrates both formal schooling and the *pesantren* system, has distinctive socio-religious dynamics in instilling the value of *ta'awun* among its *santri*. The practice of collective life in this *pesantren* not only shapes the relationship between *santri* and *kiai* but also builds solidarity among the students through various shared activities. Therefore, it is important to examine in depth how the concept of *ta'awun* is understood,

implemented, and internalized in the daily life of Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor. Based on this description, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the concept of ta'awun at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor, which includes its meaning, forms of implementation, and the process of internalization in the lives of the santri. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of research on social values in pesantren education, as well as to offer a practical description of how pesantren build a culture of mutual assistance as part of santri character formation. With this focus, this research complements previous studies that have not specifically positioned ta'awun as a central value within the system of pesantren life.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method as developed by John W. Creswell to examine in depth and contextually the implementation of Aqidah Akhlak learning on the topic of ta'awun at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor. The case study method is applied because this research focuses on a bounded system namely a single institution with its distinctive educational and socio-religious characteristics and aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the processes, actors, and cultural setting within a real-life context. Through this approach, the researcher is able to investigate the phenomenon holistically by integrating multiple sources of data (Siregar et al., 2024).

The research site was purposively selected at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor, Manunggang Julu Village, Padangsidempuan City, on the consideration that this pesantren represents a boarding-based educational environment that actively implements moral values in daily life. The research subjects consist of key informants, including the Head of Madrasah Tsanawiyah, the Aqidah Akhlak teacher, and eighth-grade santri. The informants were determined through purposive sampling in order to obtain relevant, rich, and in-depth data in accordance with the focus of the case being studied (Etikan et al., 2016). Data collection was carried out using triangulation through passive participatory observation of learning activities and social interactions in the Islamic boarding school, semi-structured in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation studies of official Islamic boarding school documents such as curriculum, syllabus, and activity archives (Fusch et al., 2018). The collected data was then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction through selection and coding to identify themes and patterns; data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives and matrices to facilitate interpretation; and conclusion drawing and verification, which were carried out repeatedly to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings. Through this series of methods, this research aims to produce a complete and reliable understanding of the real practice of applying Ta'awun values in the pesantren environment.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on the research findings, the concept of ta'awun at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor Manunggang Julu is understood as an attitude of mutual assistance among human beings grounded in the values of goodness and piety. This understanding is derived from the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, particularly Qur'an Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 2, which emphasizes the command to help one another in righteousness and piety and prohibits cooperation in sin and hostility.

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher with the Aqidah Akhlak teacher at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor Manunggang Julu, it was found that the concept of ta'awun is understood as mutual help among fellow human beings that is only justified in matters of goodness and piety. Ummi Bintang Ramina, as the Aqidah Akhlak teacher, explained that ta'awun is a fundamental value of Islamic teachings that has been passed down since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). She stated:

"As an Aqidah Akhlak teacher, one of the meanings of ta'awun is mutual assistance among fellow human beings in goodness based on the Qur'an and Hadith. Ta'awun is the characteristic of helping one another in matters of goodness, which has been a defining trait of the Muslim community since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)."

This explanation indicates that ta'awun is not understood merely as general social assistance, but rather as a religious command with a clear normative foundation. The value of ta'awun is directed toward fostering righteousness (al-birr), strengthening piety toward Allah SWT, and avoiding cooperation in sinful acts and hostility.

The teacher's understanding is in line with the students' perspectives. One student named Hafiz stated that the concept of ta'awun was not new to him, as he had studied it previously. However, learning in the pesantren provided reinforcement and deeper understanding of the concept. He stated:

"Students understand the Aqidah Akhlak lesson on ta'awun quite well because most students had already studied the topic of ta'awun in Aqidah Akhlak when they were in elementary school, and afterward the teacher repeated and reinforced the lesson on ta'awun."

This information indicates that learning ta'awun in the pesantren functions as a process of value reinforcement rather than merely an initial introduction. Students not only understand the meaning of ta'awun theoretically, but are also guided to practice it in their daily lives within the pesantren environment.

In a follow-up interview, the Aqidah Akhlak teacher further explained that instruction on ta'awun does not stop at the delivery of classroom material, but is continued through mentoring and habituation. According to her, the habitual practice of ta'awun has a very positive impact on students' lives, both socially and spiritually. She stated: *"In addition to earning rewards when it is carried out sincerely, one also attains a high status and the pleasure of Allah SWT. Moreover, ta'awun strengthens brotherhood by easing the burdens of others and facilitating the resolution of problems."*

This statement indicates that ta'awun is viewed as an effective means of character formation. Through mutual assistance, students learn to live in togetherness, reduce one another's burdens, and build harmonious relationships within the pesantren environment.

Regarding efforts to habituate the attitude of ta'awun, the Aqidah Akhlak teacher emphasized the importance of cultivating students' inner awareness as well as providing continuous guidance. She explained that habituation of ta'awun is carried out by instilling empathy and a sense of brotherhood, along with the awareness that everything possessed by human beings is merely a trust from Allah SWT. She expressed this as follows:

"Efforts to cultivate the attitude of ta'awun continuously seek to foster sympathy and empathy among fellow male and female students, as well as to strengthen a sense of brotherhood. We also continuously pray that Allah SWT will always guide us to remain"

open-hearted in helping one another, and to always realize that whatever we possess belongs to Allah, and that we are only temporary trustees."

From these interview results, it can be understood that the habituation of ta'awun at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor is carried out consciously, systematically, and continuously through instruction, role modeling, and daily-life practices.



Figure 1: The process of teaching ta'awun in the classroom by teachers

Table 1. Research Findings on the Concept and Implementation of Ta'awun at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor Manunggang Julu

No	Aspect	Research Findings
1	Fundamental Concept of <i>Ta'awun</i>	<i>Ta'awun</i> is understood as an attitude of mutual assistance among human beings grounded in the values of righteousness (<i>al-birr</i>) and piety toward Allah SWT, as emphasized in Qur'an Surah Al-Ma'idah: 2.
2	Normative Foundation	The value of <i>ta'awun</i> has a strong theological basis in the Qur'an and Hadith and is positioned as a religious obligation rather than merely a general social norm.
3	Reinforcement of Values in Learning	The teaching of <i>ta'awun</i> in the pesantren functions as a process of reinforcing and deepening values previously introduced to students, ensuring that it does not remain at a purely theoretical level.
4	Internalization Process	The internalization of this value is carried out through the integration of formal instruction, habituation, role modeling, and continuous daily-life practice.
5	Implementation in Students' Daily Life	<i>Ta'awun</i> is manifested through mutual assistance, strengthening brotherhood, easing one another's burdens, and resolving problems harmoniously within the pesantren environment.
6	Spiritual Impact	The practice of <i>ta'awun</i> is regarded as an act of worship that brings spiritual reward and leads to attaining the pleasure (<i>ridha</i>) of Allah SWT.
7	Social Impact	The value of <i>ta'awun</i> strengthens solidarity, minimizes conflict, and fosters social harmony within the communal life of the pesantren.
8	Core Value Character	<i>Ta'awun</i> is not merely a component of character education but serves as a core value that animates the entire system of pesantren life.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Ta'awun at Al-Ansor Islamic Boarding School

Linguistically, *ta'awun* derives from the word *'awn*, which means mutual help or cooperation (Saputra, 2022). In terminological usage, *ta'awun* is one of the ethical principles in Islam that leads to the realization of the values of *al-birr wa al-taqwa*, as stated in Q.S. al-Māidah [5]: 2. According to Hamka, *ta'awun* is a form of cooperation in various acts of goodness that not only strengthens the relationship between human beings and Allah but also maintains social harmony (Nurhakim, 2024). Mahmud Syaltut views *ta'awun* as the opposite of selfishness and social conflict, while Quraish Shihab emphasizes that *ta'awun* serves as the foundation for universal cooperation as long as it remains within the framework of virtue (Sirojuddin et al., 2025).

The research findings indicate that at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor, *ta'awun* is not merely understood as a topic within the Aqidah Akhlak subject. More than that, *ta'awun* has become a shared awareness embedded in the daily lives of the students (*santri*). They interpret it as a spirit of togetherness, mutual belonging, and interdependence grounded in sincerity and oriented toward seeking the pleasure (*ridha*) of Allah. This understanding demonstrates that *ta'awun* does not remain at the conceptual level but has become a value genuinely practiced in everyday life.

From the perspective of value internalization theory, this process encompasses three aspects simultaneously: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The students not only comprehend the material on *ta'awun*, but also cultivate empathy and sincerity, and then practice these values through mutual assistance in their daily activities (Haramain, 2025). This pattern aligns with the character of pesantren education as a subculture that instills values through role modeling, habituation, and a boarding school system (Haris & Amin, 2020). Thus, the success of character education in pesantren is not solely determined by the formal curriculum, but also by the hidden curriculum embedded in its traditions and social relationships.

This finding is closely related to previous studies showing that pesantren play a significant role in shaping independence, discipline, and spirituality through the boarding system, the habituation of congregational worship, and the exemplary leadership of the *kiai* (Aulia et al., 2025). The difference lies in the focus of the study. Earlier research generally positioned the values of togetherness and mutual assistance as part of character education in a broader sense. In contrast, this study demonstrates that *ta'awun* serves as the core value that animates the entire system of pesantren life.

In other words, while previous studies have emphasized how the pesantren system shapes character, this research highlights which value constitutes the very spirit of that system. This finding also reinforces the research gap identified by (Zakiah, 2025) and (Munawaroh, 2025), namely that studies specifically positioning *ta'awun* as the primary conceptual framework within pesantren culture remain limited. Therefore, this study offers a conceptual contribution by affirming *ta'awun* as a core value that integrates spiritual, social, and institutional dimensions.

Furthermore, from the perspective of social capital theory, *ta'awun* as cultivated within pesantren culture functions as social capital that strengthens internal solidarity while also fostering external relationships. This is reflected in the strong sense of brotherhood, the minimal level of conflict, and the growing social awareness among the students (*santri*).

The Implementation of Ta'awun at Al-Ansor Islamic Boarding School

The implementation of *ta'awun* at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor does not remain at the conceptual level; rather, it is genuinely present in the daily lives of the students (*santri*) in a structured and sustainable manner. This value is not only delivered through classroom instruction but is also reinforced through the pesantren's culture, which embeds it as a shared habit. This can be observed in various daily activities such as communal service to maintain the cleanliness of the dormitories and surrounding environment, duty rosters, and the practice of helping one another in learning. Students who better understand certain material naturally assist their peers who encounter difficulties, whether in religious or general subjects. Such a pattern indicates that *ta'awun* has become a social mechanism that sustains communal life within the pesantren (Rahmatullah, 2025).

From the perspective of experiential learning, these activities are not merely routine tasks; rather, they serve as learning media that enable students to directly experience the meaning of responsibility, togetherness, and care. The values taught are no longer abstract but become lived experiences that shape ways of thinking and behaving (Faruq et al., 2025).

In the context of character formation, the implementation of *ta'awun* fosters empathy, solidarity, and the ability to resolve problems in a familial manner. The tradition of visiting sick friends, fundraising for students facing hardship, and resolving conflicts through deliberation demonstrate that *ta'awun* functions as a cohesive force for social harmony within the pesantren environment (Farchan et al., 2025). This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of the boarding system, the habituation of congregational worship, and the exemplary role of the *kiai* as a hidden curriculum in shaping students' character. However, this study reveals that all these practices are centered on a single core value that drives them *ta'awun*. Thus, *ta'awun* is not merely a component of character education but the very spirit that integrates the various educational activities within the pesantren (Pulungan, 2025).

The implementation of *ta'awun* is also evident in efforts to build collective self-reliance through the management of pesantren business units, such as cooperatives, agriculture, or livestock enterprises that are collectively managed. This practice demonstrates that *ta'awun* is not only spiritual and social in nature but also has implications for economic empowerment. From the perspective of social capital theory, the value of *ta'awun* functions to strengthen solidarity while simultaneously fostering community independence.

Furthermore, *ta'awun* does not only thrive within the internal environment of the pesantren but is also manifested in its relationships with the wider community (Maulana et al., 2025). The involvement of students (*santri*) in community service activities, volunteering during natural disasters, and engaging in da'wah initiatives demonstrates that the pesantren acts as an agent of social transformation. In this context, *ta'awun* serves as a bridge connecting the pesantren with society (Susanto et al., 2023).

When related to the research gaps identified by Aulia, Zakiah, and Munawaroh, the findings at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor indicate that *ta'awun* is not merely an act of mutual assistance but constitutes a value system that integrates spiritual, social, and institutional dimensions. The process of cultivating this value occurs through the continuous integration of formal learning, role modeling, habituation, and social engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that ta'awun at Pondok Pesantren Al-Ansor Manunggang Julu is not merely a supporting value in character education, but rather a core value that animates the entire pesantren system. Ta'awun is understood not only as mutual assistance, but as a value system integrating spiritual, social, and institutional dimensions. Its impact is broader than previously assumed, as it shapes patterns of relationships, solidarity, and mechanisms for problem-solving within the students' communal life. These findings challenge the view that togetherness is only a minor component of the formal curriculum and open new discussions on the importance of core values within the pesantren educational system.

Academically, this study reinforces previous research identifying pesantren as institutions for character formation and the strengthening of socio-religious values (Nurwahida, 2025). Earlier studies emphasized the role of the hidden curriculum in fostering independence, discipline, and spirituality (Rohdiana, 2023), as well as the importance of the kiai's exemplary leadership, the boarding system, and the habituation of congregational worship (Khunaivi et al., 2025). However, as noted by Maghrobi and Iqbal (2024), studies that specifically position ta'awun as a core value remain limited and tend to treat it merely as a minor aspect of broader social moral values. This research contributes by affirming ta'awun as a primary conceptual framework within pesantren life, thereby addressing the research gap identified by Mawaddah (2025).

Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single case with a relatively small number of participants, making broad generalization difficult. Variations related to gender, age, and students' social backgrounds were also not examined in depth. Therefore, further research involving larger samples and comparative approaches across different pesantren is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

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