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Moral Resilience of Santri: Strategies of Pesantren Alumni Students in Preserving Ethical Integrity on Campus

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Abstract: In Indonesia, santri (pesantren students) who continue to urban Islamic universities undergo a notable cultural transition, moving from the structured communal life of the pesantren to academic life within a heterogeneous urban environment. Although Islamic universities uphold religious values and nurture a religious campus, external urban influences and the weakening of students' personal motivation to sustain worship after leaving communal supervision can reshape their moral experience. Understanding how santri alumni navigate this transition is crucial for Islamic higher education. This qualitative field study used an interpretive phenomenological approach to examine the moral resilience strategies of pesantren alumni at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, positioning the campus as the locus rather than an object of evaluation. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation with eight undergraduate students who had resided in pesantren for at least three years, plus three supporting informants. The findings revealed that the shift to a heterogeneous urban setting triggers culture shock, as evidenced in gender-mixed interactions and a perceived shift in peers' religious practices, which participants attribute to external influences rather than the institution. Rather than withdrawing physically, students exercise selective social filtering while maintaining inclusive academic engagement. Sufi values such as tawakal, patience, and ikhlas (sincere) serve as psychological stabilizers, while identity management is dualistic: some invoke their santri status as a moral resource, others conceal it to ease collective expectations. These findings yield a conceptual modification, Neo-Zuhud Urban (Open Practical Asceticism), reframing classical santri moral withdrawal as an inclusive practice enacted within, not apart from, public social life.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools have long been the foundation of moral and spiritual development for the young generation of Indonesian Muslims. This education system does not only transfer cognitive knowledge; it actively cultivates character values such as sincerity, independence, and simplicity through a holistic, round-the-clock mentoring model (Fahham, 2020; Mukti Ali, Ronald Gunawan, Lanny Octavia, Ahmat Hilmi, Ibi Syatibi, 2017). The foundation of this character building rests on a deep tradition of Sufi ethics (*Sufism),* as reflected in the classic work *Ihya Ulumuddin* by Al-Ghazali, which emphasizes the integration of intellectual acuity with inner purity (Gani, 2019; Maksudin, 2017; Malik Karim Amrullah, 1963). Significant challenges arise when students complete communal education at Islamic boarding schools and continue to university. This transition often triggers culture shock as students move from a strictly regulated environment (a *total institution*) to a social space that values individual autonomy and freedom (Anggra Ditya Miftakhul Rizqo and Moh. Mudzakkir, 2023; Novialdi, 2022). From a broader perspective, the rapid flow of globalization demands a contextual reconstruction of value-based education so that students' faith beliefs and moral behavior do not experience radical dislocation (Adisiti Anggaraini, 2025).

The reality of the transition was confirmed through initial observations and in-depth interviews with a number of Islamic boarding school alumni students at one of the Islamic universities in urban areas of Indonesia. Preliminary findings showed that the process of moving from a structured pesantren

environment to a more independent campus life gives birth to a dilemmatic experience. On the one hand, some students experience culture shock in the form of spiritual transitions because worship routines are no longer supported by community togetherness, as in Islamic boarding schools. They also face moral discomfort due to exposure to more open campus associations, including cross-gender interactions and changing norms of decency in public spaces. The social environment, globalization, and cultural change can contribute to the moral degradation of students in higher education (Widyastuti, 2025). On the other hand, some students are able to maintain moral integrity through independent self-management strategies, such as choosing a friendship environment that is in line with their ethical values and principles (Nasir & Ramdhan, 2026). Another important finding showed that there is a tendency among some students to hide their identity as an effort to reduce psychological pressure from environmental moral expectations while maintaining a positive image of the original pesantren when they adjust to daily social interactions.

The discourse on ethical crises and the importance of spirituality for students has attracted widespread scholarly attention over the past decade. Contemporary studies confirmed that in the era of disruption, Sufi ethics education serves as an important instrument to protect the younger generation from moral deterioration and social deviance (Afidah, 2025; Gani, 2019). More specifically, the application of Sufi values such as *tazkiyatun nafs* has been shown to correlate significantly with increased spiritual intelligence and a decrease in negative character traits among students (Achmad Junaedi Sitika et al., 2024; Ahunaya et al., 2025; Suci et al., 2019). To respond to the influence of global consumerism and popular culture, religious institutions need a systematic internalization of values through mentorship, adaptive habituation, and targeted spiritual counseling (Yuha Ilaiya, Hana Ni'matul Izzah, Andika, 2024) This resonates with the philosophy of character education of prominent Sufi scholars, ranging from the concept of moral moderation of Jalaluddin Rumi to the epistemology of ma'rifah *and* mahabbah *Al-Ghazali*, which is believed to foster internal resilience (Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Ahmadali Gholami, 2021). At the sociological level, the internalization of Sufi teachings integrated with scientific knowledge has been shown to be able to build constructive interpersonal relationships amidst the dynamics of modern academic life (Idris & Ghozali, 2025; Mukhlisin, 2025). As a structural response to the gap between rational and spiritual achievement, some universities have even begun to adopt an integrated model through student pesantren programs (Bilqisth, 2026).

Despite this literature, a closer review reveals gaps that still need to be addressed. Most existing research tends to be polarized around two poles: library-based studies that focus on theoretical-philosophical analysis (Ebrahimi et al., 2021; Syakir et al., 2025), or evaluative research centered on institutional dormitory-based intervention programs (Bilqisth, 2026). Until now, qualitative research that specifically examines moral resilience strategies based on student initiatives remains relatively limited, especially among pesantren alumni students who adapt to non-dormitory Islamic universities. In fact, Islamic campuses located in urban areas are complex social spaces because they bring together Islamic scientific traditions with the popular culture of the surrounding urban areas, which are more open and diverse, while student life in boarding houses outside the campus is no longer under communal supervision like in Islamic boarding schools. This condition is relevant to globalization, technological advancement, and the social environment, which can contribute to the moral degradation of students in higher education (Widyastuti, 2025). In the context of pesantren alumni students, the Islamic identity of the campus does not automatically make it a completely safe space; Although Islamic religious universities have tried to maintain an academic environment with Islamic nuances, the move to a more diverse urban life around campus, exposure to popular culture and digital media, and weakened personal motivation to maintain worship routines after escaping the communal supervision of pesantren can give rise to culture shock, moral pressure, and psychological burden in maintaining self-integrity. It should be emphasized that the focus of this research is on student experience and agency, not evaluation of campus; The campus is positioned as the locus where the transition experience takes place. Departing from this gap, this research focuses on the challenges of moral adaptation and resilience strategies of pesantren alumni students in maintaining moral integrity during the transition to campus life in an urban environment. This study was conducted at one of the Islamic higher education institutions in urban areas of Indonesia, with an analysis unit comprising undergraduate students with at least 3 years of pesantren

education. Based on this focus, this research is directed to answer three questions: (1) How do pesantren alumni students experience the transition from a structured pesantren environment to Islamic campus life in urban areas? (2) What moral resilience strategies did they use to maintain their integrity during the transition? and (3) How does the internalization of Sufi values and the management of student identity support the resilience strategy?

METHOD

Research Design

This research used a qualitative approach with interpretive phenomenological design (hermeneutics) as developed by van Manen to understand the experiences of pesantren alumni students in dealing with cultural transitions and maintaining moral resilience in the campus environment. A type of interpretive phenomenology was chosen, rather than purely descriptive phenomenology, because this study not only describes the structure of experience, but also interprets the meaning that participants attach to those transitional experiences. This design required researchers to explore participants' subjective experiences in their natural contexts, especially related to culture shock, psychological distress, adaptation strategies, and spiritual identity management (Creswell, 2014).

Location and Research Participants

The research was conducted at the State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This location was chosen because it represents the meeting between Islamic scientific traditions and urban popular culture, has students from various regions with Islamic boarding school backgrounds, and allows observation of students' social interactions in campus public spaces. The research participants consisted of eight students of the cross-faculty undergraduate program who were alumni of the pesantren (hereinafter referred to as S1–S9) and three supporting informants in the form of peers and dormitory administrators (hereinafter referred to as P1–P3). Participants were selected purposively using a maximum variety strategy, including students with backgrounds in both Salafi and modern Islamic boarding schools. The participant criteria are: active students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga, with at least three years of experience living in an Islamic boarding school, and who have or are experiencing a transition to independent life in a non-dormitory environment. The identities of the participants were kept confidential and replaced with codes (S1–S9 for pesantren alumni students and P1–P3 for supporting informants), which were used consistently throughout the manuscript to maintain confidentiality.

Instruments and Data Collection

The main instrument of this research is the Islamic Boarding School Alumni Students with a minimum of 3 years, assisted by semi-structured interview guidelines. The interview guidelines were prepared based on five main focuses, namely transition dynamics and culture shock, response to moral change, moral resilience strategies, internalization of Sufi values, and student identity management. Data collection was carried out through passive participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Observations were used to observe daily social interactions, cross-gender social etiquette, and students' spiritual behavior in campus public spaces and classrooms. The interview was conducted to explore the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of pesantren alumni students in maintaining moral integrity independently (Table 1).

Table 1. Instrument Interview

Interview Focus	Probing Aspects	Informant
Transition dynamics and culture shock	Early experience of adaptation from pesantren to campus	S
Response to moral change	Views on changing peer ethics and religious practices	S
Moral resilience strategies	Selection of friendship environment and social boundaries	S/P
Internalization of Sufi values	The role of trust, patience, and sincerity in the face of	S

Interview Focus	Probing Aspects	Informant
	pressure	
Identity management of students	Attitude towards the appearance or concealment of the identity of the student	S

Description: S = students of the Islamic boarding school; P = supporting informant.

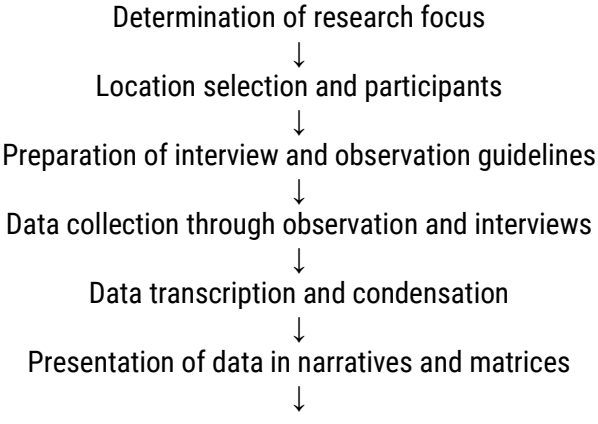
Data Analysis

In line with the orientation of interpretive phenomenology, thematic analysis is operationalized through the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three stages, namely data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Matthew B. Miles, A Michael Huberman, 2014). Data condensation was carried out by selecting and simplifying data from interview transcripts and field notes. Data presentation was presented in a descriptive narrative and a matrix of findings, while conclusions were drawn gradually through a continuous verification process. The validity of the data was maintained by referring to Creswell's qualitative validity strategy, namely triangulation, *member checking*, researcher reflexivity, in-depth description, and peer examination to ensure that the findings remain credible and in accordance with the participants' experience (Creswell, 2014). Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation (comparing the data of S1–S9 pesantren alumni students with the data of P1–P3 supporting informants in the form of peers and dormitory administrators), technical triangulation (comparing the results of semi-structured interviews with the observation results of passive participants to confirm the consistency between statements and actual behavior), member checking (returning a summary of findings to participants to verify the accuracy of interpretation), and joint peer debriefing supervisors and colleagues to challenge and sharpen interpretation.

Transferability was pursued through a thick description of the participants' context and experiences, so that the reader can assess the extent to which the findings are relevant to other contexts. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through an audit trail, which is to systematically document all analytical decisions, field notes, and transcripts so that the flow of conclusion can be traced. To minimize researcher bias, reflexivity was maintained through reflective journal writing during data collection and analysis, and ensured interpretation was based on empirical evidence in the field, not the researcher's personal assumptions or experiences. In line with the phenomenological tradition, researchers also apply bracketing (epoché) by writing down initial prejudices and preconceptions before analysis, so that the meaning that emerges is sought to be sourced from the participants' experiences, not from a forced theoretical framework. In practice, the data condensation stage is carried out through open coding of the units of meaning, which are then grouped into themes and cross-participant experience structures.

Research Flow Diagram

The research methodology is subsequently summarized into a research flow as illustrated in Figure 1.



Withdrawal and verification of conclusions

↓

Triangulation and member checking

Figure 1.Research Flow

Ethical Considerations

This research was carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of research, especially participant consent, data confidentiality, anonymity, and protection of informant comfort. The permit to carry out the research was obtained through an official letter from the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta with number B-1501.50/Un.02/TT/PN.01/05/2026, dated May 29, 2026, for a research entitled *"Moral Resilience of Santri: Strategies of Pesantren Alumni Students in Preserving Ethical Integrity on Campus".*

Before data collection was carried out, each participant was informed of the research objectives, interview procedures, voluntariness of participation, the right to refuse to answer certain questions, and the right to resign at any time without consequences. Participant consent was obtained through *an informed consent sheet* before the interview was conducted. In the sheet, participants were also informed that the interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner, could be recorded for data accuracy, and that the interpretation results could be reconfirmed through the member checking process.

The confidentiality of participants' identities was maintained by changing their real names using informant codes, such as S1–S9 and P1–P3. Personal information that has the potential to lead to the identity of participants, such as faculty, origin of Islamic boarding schools, and other personal data, was disguised in reporting research results. Interview and transcript data were only used for academic purposes, stored on a limited basis, and not disseminated to other parties. The researcher also did not make himself a research subject to maintain objectivity and avoid role conflicts.

RESULT

This section presents the findings of in-depth interviews and participant observations with Islamic boarding school alumni students at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. The findings are organized under three main themes: (1) transition dynamics and culture shock, (2) resilience strategies and social boundaries, and (3) the internalization of spiritual values and identity management.

Dynamics of Transition and Culture Shock

The shift from a structured pesantren environment to campus life in urban areas has caused culture shock among pesantren alumni students. Students accustomed to strict gender segregation and collectively driven worship routines are suddenly confronted with more diverse urban social norms and the need to build spiritual motivation independently, especially when living in dormitories outside the campus environment.

One female student (S1) articulated her surprise: *"I was suddenly shocked to have to study in the same room with a man ... In the past, [male and female students] were completely separated. Now they're all mixed together."* In addition, S2 expressed his concern about the changes he perceived in some of his fellow pesantren alumni: *"It turns out that some people who used to be together in the pesantren now rarely pray and are often late for prayers... and some of those with a purely religious background, I noticed, were less mindful of etiquette."* Regarding self-reliance, S3 describes his psychological transition: *"In the early weeks on campus ... If I want to recite the Qur'an, I have to motivate myself... Not like before. Because at the pesantren we run it together in one group."*

Resilience Strategy and Social Boundary Setting

In response to more open social patterns and shifts in moral norms in the campus environment, pesantren alumni students do not completely withdraw from the social space. Instead, they practice selective social screening, which is to remain openly engaged in academic interactions while resolutely distancing themselves from activities that violate their moral principles. This pattern was also evident in

the participants' observations, which show the tendency of students to form social circles with colleagues who have comparable moral commitments; however, the main evidence still relies on the statements of participants in the interview.

Regarding this strategy, (S4) explained: *"I still accept anyone as they are... but I will set limits on things that are not good."* S5 revealed a similar approach to choosing close friends: *"If one looks really aware and keeps their boundaries ... Maybe he's the one I'll get close to."* Beyond the curation of friendships, adaptation also involves a thoughtful way of speaking. S6 described his attempts to dampen his religious expressions in class: *"I tried several times to simplify my language ... so that friends who do not have a pesantren background do not feel offended."*

Internalization of Spiritual Values and Identity Management

The moral resilience of students is strongly shaped by their practical internalization of Sufi teachings and by the tactics they use in managing identities in public spaces. Values such as *tawakal* and *patience* serve as psychological stabilizers against the double pressures of academic demands and financial needs. Typical dynamics also emerge regarding self-representation: some students choose to hide their pesantren background (*concealing their identity*) to avoid the weight of external moral expectations.

Regarding the practice of *tawakal*, (S4), which combines studies with part-time work, stated: *"What I understand about life is that effort is obligatory, but the result is determined by Allah. So I kept trying..."* On concealing identities to navigate social friction, S7 described his subtle rejection tactics: *"I'm one of those people who hide it... because I am afraid that my santri label will be attached to things that do not reflect who I am."*

This finding is in line with the argument that ethical decline in the era of globalization results from the weakening of the internalization of religious principles (Anggraini Adisti, 2025). It should be noted that not all alumni of Islamic boarding schools display the same resilience pattern. As revealed by S2, some of their colleagues did not continue their worship routine and adopted different norms of politeness after being released from the pesantren's communal supervision. This diversity of experience indicates that moral resilience is not an inevitability of the pesantren background, but depends on the success of students in transforming the structured discipline of the pesantren into autonomous self-regulation; This incomplete transformation is what is seen in those who have experienced this shift in religious practice (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Themes, Subthemes, and Field Findings

No.	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Brief Interview Excerpt	Inf.	Observational Finding
1	Transition Dynamics and Culture Shock	Gender-mixed classroom interaction	"I was surprised to study in the same room with male students…"	S1	Students maintained physical distance and ethical boundaries during classroom interaction.
2	Transition Dynamics and Culture Shock	Shifting religious practices among fellow alumni	"Some former pesantren students rarely prayed on time…"	S2	The participant showed concern but avoided direct confrontation.
3	Transition Dynamics and Culture Shock	Loss of the communal worship ecosystem	"When I wanted to recite the Qur'an, I had to motivate myself…"	S3	Students needed time to rebuild self-motivated worship routines.
4	Resilience Strategy and Social Boundary-Setting	Selective social filtering	"I still accept everyone, but I set limits…"	S4	Students remained open in academic interaction while avoiding unproductive social activities.
5	Resilience	Close friendship	"If someone	S5	Students tended to build

No.	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Brief Interview Excerpt	Inf.	Observational Finding
	Strategy and Social Boundary-Setting	circle curation	maintains boundaries, I may get closer to them."		friendships with peers who shared similar moral commitments.
6	Resilience Strategy and Social Boundary-Setting	Language adjustment and humble expression	"I simplified my language so others would not feel offended."	S6	Students displayed inclusive and humble communication during religious discussions.
7	Spiritual Internalization and Identity Management	Tawakal under academic and financial pressure	"Effort is necessary, but the result belongs to God."	S4	Tawakal helped students maintain psychological stability while studying and working.
8	Spiritual Internalization and Identity Management	Concealment of santri identity	"I tend to hide it because I fear the santri label will be attached to me."	S7	Some students avoided explicitly displaying their santri identity to reduce social expectations.

DISCUSSION

Before discussing the findings further, it is necessary to clarify the context to avoid misinterpretation as a negative evaluation of the campus. The findings of this study are not directed to assess the moral performance of institutions, but rather to understand students' experiences and resilience strategies during the transition. UIN Sunan Kalijaga, as an Islamic religious university, institutionally has and continues to carry out efforts to maintain the Islamic atmosphere of the campus, including through a curriculum containing Islamic studies, religious activities, and supportive academic disciplines. The moral distress experienced by the participants, as illustrated by their stories, stems more from the interaction with urban social spaces outside the campus gates, exposure to popular culture and digital media that accompanies city life, and last but not least, the weakening of personal motivation to maintain a worship routine after escaping the communal supervision of the pesantren. With this framework, the campus is positioned as the locus of the transitional experience, while the moral dynamics observed result from interactions between the broader urban context and the student's personal agency.

Local Agencies and Moral Resilience Strategies

When faced with the pressures of freer association and shifting moral norms in the urban social spaces that surround campuses, this study found that resilience is not enforced through radical physical withdrawal. Students who manage to maintain their stance practice highly selective social distancing without breaking friendships. This pattern was reflected in the S4 principle of association, which still accepts everyone as a friend but sets strict limits on things that are considered not good, as explained in the Results section.

This strategy of self-agency is a form of adaptive intelligence that resonates with the importance of a holistic Islamic education based on multicultural values, where the social and spiritual dimensions are integrated so that students can respond to environmental differences without losing their core beliefs (Miranti Anggraini, nadir, 2025).

Internalizing Spiritual Values and Psychological Resilience

The psychological resilience of students is closely related to the structure of Islamic Psychology and Sufi ethics. Field data showed that students use the concept *of tawakal*/to reduce the double pressure of academic and economic demands. S4, who studies while working part-time, interpreted his business as an obligation whose final results are left to Allah, so that he is able to continue to work without being burdened with excessive anxiety (see Results).

This disposition is structurally connected to the work, which suggests that religious spirituality significantly strengthens the mental health of students. (Maulita et al., 2025), Sufi values such as *patience*

and *qana'ah* function as essential mental stabilizers and become living texts in students' axiological consciousness (Amalia & Saifuddin, 2022).

Representation of Santri Identity and Social Ethics in Public Spaces

Regarding identity management, the findings confirmed that maintaining modest clothing and social boundaries is a form of self-protection. This validates research that argues the hijab and simple clothing represent a legal identity and spirituality that rejects the commodification of the body in the modern era (Amri Effendi, Asa Syarosy, 2025). This consistent ethical attitude has been empirically proven as a preventive approach to verbal harassment in the campus environment (Noktaria et al., 2026). Interestingly, not all students openly display their pesantren background in public spaces. S7, for example, chose to hide the identity of his students because he was worried that the label was associated with things that did not reflect him, as explained in the results section. This proves the burden *of collective representation* on the shoulders of students, adding to the sociological complexity of adapting their characters in the public space (Saleh, 2014).

Synthesis of Findings and Positions on Previous Research

The three themes of the findings, cultural shocks in transitional times, selective social screening, and the internalization of Sufi values accompanied by identity management, do not stand alone, but form a pattern of moral resilience that is intertwined. Placed in conversation with previous literature, this pattern shows both a common point and a point of difference. On the one hand, these findings strengthen the thesis that Islamic education based on multicultural values allows students to respond to diversity without losing core beliefs (Miranti Anggraini, nadir, 2025), and resonates with the role of spirituality as a support for mental health (Sovia Dewi Maulita, Veri Dwi Adiningsih, Lusiana Noviawati & Briliana Fian Hartanti, Diana Nur Apni, 2025). On the other hand, these findings are contrary to the classic assumption in the study of Sufism, which links the maintenance of moral purity to 'uzlah or physical withdrawal: none of the participants undergo isolation, and resilience is instead enforced in social engagement. (Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Ahmadali Gholami, 2021).

The new perspective that emerged lies in the dualism of student identity management. Some literature tends to display the identity of students as moral capital that is highlighted in the public space (Saleh, 2014), while this finding showed the opposite strategy that is rarely highlighted, namely, the conscious concealment of identity to ease the burden of collective representation. Thus, the main contribution of this research is not just to describe adaptation strategies, but to show that the moral resilience of students on urban campuses operates through inclusive but principled self-agency. It is at this point that the available conceptual framework feels inadequate: the classical concepts of zuhud and 'uzlah are incapable of explaining the practice of "inner asceticism" carried out in the center, rather than away from, the social crowd (Reza & Aulia Nadhirah, 2025). It is this conceptual gap that demands a reformulation as outlined in the following section.

Emerging Conceptual Modifications: Urban Neo-Zuhud (Open Practical Asceticism)

Classical Sufi literature generally defines *zuhud* or *'uzlah* as a complete withdrawal from the hustle and bustle of worldly life in order to maintain the purity of the soul (Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Ahmadali Gholami, 2021). In the classical Sufism tradition, this concept is often associated with physical seclusion and total rejection of worldly interactions. However, the study's empirical findings consistently showed a different pattern: none of the eight participants responded to moral distress in the urban spaces around campus by physically withdrawing from the social environment. Instead, they develop an inclusive but principled moral management strategy, namely, remaining involved in social interactions on campus and its surroundings selectively and consciously. It is this gap between the classical concept of zuhud and empirical reality that drives the need for conceptual modification. The existing concept is insufficient to explain the phenomenon in which mental asceticism is practiced in the middle, not far from, the hustle and bustle of urban life that surrounds the campus. Departing from this gap, the study proposes a conceptual modification called "Open Practical Asceticism" or "Neo-Zuhud Urban." This modification advances the following postulates: *Moral resilience in the modern era does not require the subject to escape (physically isolate) from a challenging environment. Instead, subjects practice "psychological withdrawal" and regulate their self-presentation in an inclusive manner within public spaces.*

This modification is empirically supported by the behavior of students from Salafiyah Pesantren (S6), who consciously simplify their religious expressions in class so that friends without a pesantren background do not feel offended and are not seen as arrogant (see Results section). This shows that "moral asceticism" is practiced precisely in the midst of social interaction.

This concept expands on previous discourse by asserting that noble religious values, such as local wisdom used as a spiritual response to disasters (Novitasari et al., 2025) can be adapted into a flexible, inclusive, yet morally steadfast sociocultural response to changing moral norms in higher education. It should be emphasized that "Neo-Zuhud Urban" is proposed here as a tentative concept that is still context-bound, namely built from the experience of eight participants in one institution. This concept is more appropriately understood as a sharpening of the meaning of classical zuhud to be relevant to contemporary social space, rather than as a finding that is ready to be generalized. Its validity and redirectability still need to be tested in the context and the wider population.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it was conducted at a single institution (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta) with only eight main participants and three supporting informants, so the findings are context-bound and not intended for broad statistical generalization. Second, the purposive sampling emphasized students who had relatively succeeded in adapting, which may have produced an overly positive picture and underrepresented the experiences of those facing greater difficulty in moral adaptation. Third, as an interpretive phenomenological study, the analysis was inseparable from the researcher's interpretation; although bracketing, reflexivity, and peer debriefing were applied, a degree of subjectivity remains. Fourth, the data relied predominantly on self-reported interviews, while the participant observation served mainly to corroborate rather than to generate primary evidence. These limitations should be read as boundaries of scope rather than flaws, and they open avenues for further inquiry.

Implications

These findings carry implications that go beyond the individual experiences of the participants. Theoretically, this study enriches the study of Islamic Psychology and Sufism ethics by showing that classical spiritual values can be transformed into adaptive psychological resources in the context of modern higher education. Institutionally, the finding that the sharpest cultural shocks occur in the early phases of the transition hints at the need for Islamic religious universities to design orientation programs that specifically prepare pesantren alumni students to face a more heterogeneous social space, for example, through strengthening pesantren-campus collaboration as initiated (Bilqisth, 2026) and a multicultural value-based curriculum (Miranti Anggraini, nadir, 2025).

For the student assistance and service system, the findings regarding the weakening of worship discipline during independent living and the burden of collective representation demand the presence of a psychosocial mentoring system that is sensitive to the negotiation of religious identity. Academic counselors and advisors need to understand that concealing students' identities is not always a sign of a decline in commitment, but can be an adaptive strategy to manage social pressure; A judgmental response actually risks aggravating the psychological burden on students. Thus, the ideal support is not to impose the prominence of identity, but to facilitate students to build autonomous self-regulation so that the moral discipline that was once supported by the pesantren community can continue independently in the campus environment. This implication also contributes to a new conceptual understanding that the moral resilience of students in Islamic higher education is more appropriately seen as an inclusive agency process rather than simply a legacy of obedience from Islamic boarding schools.

Recommendations

In light of these limitations, several recommendations are proposed. Future research is encouraged to (1) test the Neo-Zuhud Urban concept across other state Islamic universities (PTKIN) and private campuses to assess its transferability; (2) specifically explore the experiences of pesantren alumni who struggle with moral adaptation in order to obtain a more balanced picture; (3) employ longitudinal designs that follow students across the full arc of transition rather than a single point in time; and (4) examine the role of digital media and online communities in shaping the religious identity negotiation of

pesantren alumni. For practitioners, Islamic universities are advised to design transition-orientation programs for incoming pesantren alumni and to equip academic advisors and counselors with an understanding of identity negotiation, so that support fosters autonomous self-regulation rather than imposing outward displays of piety.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the transition of pesantren alumni students from a structured pesantren environment to Islamic campus life in urban areas gives rise to culture shock, especially in the form of shock at the interaction of mixed gender classes, weakening communal support in worship routines, and concern about the shift in religious practices of some fellow pesantren alumni. However, moral resilience is not achieved through physical withdrawal from campus social spaces, but rather through selective adaptation strategies, such as social filtering, forming morally aligned social circles, and adjusting language in academic interactions.

These findings also show that sophisticated values such as tawakal and patience play a role as a source of psychological stability in the face of academic, economic, and social pressures. In addition, student identity management is an important strategy for maintaining a balance between personal moral commitment and social pressure to represent. Based on these findings, this study proposes the concept of Neo-Zuhud Urban, namely a form of moral resilience that is grounded not in physical isolation but in self-control, social selectivity, and principled public engagement. By answering the three research questions, the study affirms that the moral resilience of pesantren alumni in urban Islamic higher education operates as an inclusive form of personal agency. The limitations of this study and directions for future research have been elaborated in the preceding section.

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