

The Ambivalent Role of Yahanu: A Phenomenon of Excessive Self-Confidence and Its Implications for Santri's Character Development

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Abstract

Pesantren serve as vital institutions in shaping students' character. One phenomenon observed in Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah is *yahanu*, a form of self-confidence often perceived as excessive. This phenomenon reflects a tension between confidence and humility, making it essential to examine in the context of character development. This study employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically with triangulation to ensure validity. The findings reveal that *yahanu* has a dual impact. On the positive side, it fosters motivation, healthy competition, and leadership skills. On the negative side, it may create social distance and conflict if left unmanaged. The role of teachers and *kyai* as mentors and role models is crucial in directing *yahanu* toward constructive outcomes. The study implies the need for effective guidance and institutional policies that wisely manage this social dynamic, thereby transforming *yahanu* into a strength that supports character building among students.

Keywords: Yahanu, Pesantren, Student Character, Self-Confidence, Islamic Education.

Abstrak

Pesantren merupakan institusi penting dalam pembentukan karakter santri. Salah satu fenomena yang muncul di lingkungan Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah adalah *yahanu*, yaitu sikap percaya diri yang dianggap berlebihan. Fenomena ini mencerminkan ketegangan antara nilai percaya diri dan kerendahan hati, sehingga perlu dikaji untuk memahami dinamika pembentukan karakter santri. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Data dianalisis secara tematik dengan menerapkan triangulasi untuk menjamin keabsahan temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *yahanu* memiliki dampak ganda. Secara positif, *yahanu* dapat mendorong motivasi, kompetisi yang sehat, dan jiwa kepemimpinan. Namun, secara negatif berpotensi menimbulkan jarak sosial dan konflik apabila tidak terkelola dengan baik. Peran guru dan kiai sebagai pembimbing dan teladan sangat menentukan dalam mengarahkan *yahanu* ke arah yang konstruktif. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pendampingan yang efektif serta kebijakan pesantren yang bijaksana dalam mengelola dinamika sosial, sehingga *yahanu* dapat ditransformasi menjadi kekuatan yang mendukung pembangunan karakter santri.

Kata Kunci: *Yahanu*, Pesantren, Karakter Santri, Percaya Diri, Pendidikan Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia play a pivotal role in shaping students' (santri) personality and character, not only in terms of knowledge and spirituality but also in the realm of social development (Zh, 2021). Santri are not merely engaged in the study of religious texts and formal subjects; they are also trained

in communal life that emphasizes discipline, leadership, and moral values. Research indicates that pesantren have long served as institutions instilling character education through habituation, discipline, and strong role modelling (Fahham, 2013). At Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School in South Jakarta, the daily life of santri is organized in a systematic manner, where student organizations and committees provide space for leadership training as well as peer interaction.

The confidence expressed through speaking style, leadership behavior, and decision-making is often perceived differently among santri. For some, it is seen as a sign of courage, whereas others interpret it as arrogance or pretentiousness. Among Darunnajah students, this behavior is popularly referred to as *yahanu*. The term originates from Arabic and is used in everyday conversations to mock or criticize students considered to be overly self-assertive. Studies suggest that such social practices represent a form of peer control in maintaining balanced relationships within pesantren life (Apiyah, 2021).

For teachers and religious instructors, the noticeable self-confidence of students is often regarded as natural and even essential. Santri who are willing to take initiative are usually perceived as better prepared to lead, maintain order, and uphold authority within the boarding school. This aligns with the broader objective of pesantren education, which seeks to nurture strong character and readiness to face future challenges. Previous studies affirm that teachers and *kyai* (Islamic scholars) play a central role in fostering students' confidence through direct guidance as well as close supervision in daily activities (Fahrurrozi, 2022).

However, not all students share this view. Some feel that such behavior creates social distance, disrupts harmony, and undermines togetherness. The label *yahanu* is often used as a critique of perceived excessive behavior, reflecting a tension between the need for confidence and the value of humility. In everyday life, the expected norms frequently diverge from actual practices, creating a gap between ideals and reality. Similar tensions have also been identified in studies on social relations in several modern pesantren in Indonesia (Amirudin, 2025).

The ultimate mission of pesantren is not only to produce knowledgeable graduates in religious sciences but also individuals of integrity, responsibility, and noble character. Within this framework, *yahanu* may serve as a mirror for assessing whether students are able to balance confidence with humility. Research highlights that effective character education is the product of a combination of cognitive learning, *kyai* role modeling, and peer social interaction (Tamsir, 2022). Hence, this phenomenon is significant to examine within the broader framework of character formation.

From a positive perspective, *yahanu* can encourage students to be more courageous, highly motivated, and well-trained in leadership. Such confidence constitutes an important asset for santri after graduating from pesantren, whether in pursuing higher education or contributing to society. The ability to make decisions and speak in public is a valuable skill not commonly possessed by all. These findings

resonate with studies emphasizing that pesantren successfully train santri to become independent and confident individuals through structured internal leadership systems (Fahrurrozi, 2022).

Nevertheless, *yahanu* can also lead to undesirable consequences if not properly guided. Students who excessively display self-assertion may face social stigma from peers, resulting in emotional distance, reduced solidarity, and potential conflicts. Such conditions are in stark contrast with the spirit of fraternity that pesantren aim to cultivate. Other studies have noted that excessive behavior within boarding schools may trigger social fragmentation if not managed through appropriate guidance (Apiyah, 2021).

The usage of the term *yahanu* underscores the significant role of language in pesantren life. Language functions not merely as a tool of communication but also as a means of evaluation, critique, and behavioral regulation. Through this term, students remind one another of boundaries without the need for formal rules. *Yahanu* operates as a socially acknowledged mechanism of control, despite being only a simple expression. This corresponds with scholarly views that in pesantren, language often conveys values and sustains social cohesion (Fahham, 2013).

The role of teachers and religious instructors is crucial in shaping the development of such attitudes. They act as role models and regulators, not only by offering advice but also by embodying exemplary behavior. Through consistent guidance and role modeling, students' confidence can be directed toward positive outcomes while being safeguarded from devolving into arrogance. Without strong mentorship, students may easily fall into detrimental behaviors that harm both themselves and their environment. Recent research confirms that character education in pesantren is most effective when teachers serve as primary role models in students' daily lives (Amirudin, 2025).

Thus, the phenomenon of *yahanu* is not merely about individual attitudes but reflects the collective life within pesantren. It illustrates how student organizations, daily interactions, and habitual practices shape distinctive character traits. On one hand, it fosters courage and leadership; on the other, it can provoke conflicts and weaken solidarity. This duality aligns with studies suggesting that collective life in pesantren inherently generates dynamics between leadership and solidarity (Tamsir, 2022).

The study of *yahanu* is important for understanding the processes of character formation among santri. Character is not an innate quality but the outcome of long-term social interaction. Santri learn not only from the religious texts they study but also from everyday experiences, including criticism, mockery, and shared expressions circulating within their community. By examining this phenomenon, researchers can better capture how character education is enacted in real terms in the pesantren context. This supports findings that santri acquire values primarily through social interaction and dormitory life experiences (Fahrurrozi, 2022).

This research is also expected to assist pesantren administrators in developing effective student development strategies. By understanding the dynamics of *yahanu*, teachers and religious instructors can more wisely direct students' confidence while maintaining humility. Proper guidance can yield graduates who are not only intellectually capable but also emotionally mature and prepared to become ethical leaders. As Amirudin (2025) notes, character formation in santri results from repeated, structured, and systematically directed practices.

Moreover, this study contributes to Islamic education scholarship by highlighting the role of language and social dynamics within pesantren. While much of the literature focuses on curricula, teaching methods, or institutional management, fewer studies have examined everyday social phenomena such as *yahanu*. Therefore, this research seeks to enrich the discourse by demonstrating how a simple student expression can serve as a key determinant in character formation (Fahham, 2013; Apiyah, 2021).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to explain the influence of the so-called "pretentious" attitude or *yahanu* on the character formation of santri at Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School in South Jakarta. The analysis not only addresses its negative aspects but also considers the possibility that *yahanu* may serve as a pathway toward positive development when properly guided. This study aspires to provide a comprehensive understanding of how a simple, student-generated expression can play a crucial role in the process of character education (Amirudin, 2025; Tamsir, 2022).

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in the pesantren context, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures (Sugiyono, 2016). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant and non-participant observations, and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives, while observations provided insights into both daily interactions and organizational dynamics. Document analysis was used to triangulate the findings with archival records and written materials.

To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied by comparing evidence from different sources. Thematic analysis was conducted through systematic stages of data reduction, coding, presentation, and interpretation. Ethical considerations were carefully observed by obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and minimizing researcher bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Attitude of Pretentiousness/*Yahanu* as a Social Mechanism in Pesantren.

The phenomenon of "*yahanu*," or pretentious behavior among students, has important implications for character formation in Islamic boarding schools

(*pesantren*). A phenomenological study shows that character development is shaped through lived experiences, social interactions, and the dynamics of daily life in the *pesantren*. Behaviors that may at first appear negative can serve as an entry point for moral learning, especially when teachers and religious leaders (*kyai*) provide guidance and strengthen positive values (Amien et al., 2022).

Leadership has a central role in shaping morality and student character. Leadership that is grounded in religious principles, role modeling, and moral instruction enables students to understand the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This process creates a setting for moral education that is not only based on knowledge but also practiced in daily life (Supriani et al., 2023).

The position of the *kyai* is crucial in transmitting national and civic values. Through personal example, teaching, and the integration of religious principles, *pesantren* function as centers of character education that emphasize both religiosity and social responsibility. In this way, *pesantren* contribute to forming individuals with strong ethical commitments and civic awareness (Sammali Bin Hj Adam & Irawan, 2020).

The changing role of *pesantren* in the modern era also influences strategies for moral education. As students are increasingly shaped by globalization, educational approaches must adjust to new social contexts while still preserving long-standing traditions. This balance allows *pesantren* to remain relevant to the younger generation (Jubba et al., 2021).

Character education is transmitted not only through the formal curriculum but also through traditions, culture, and everyday practices. The routines of religious study, collective worship, and community engagement serve as reinforcement for shaping student behavior. These activities strengthen discipline and provide a cultural foundation for ethical growth (Putro & Suryono, 2019).

Alongside education, *pesantren* have expanded their role as centers of community empowerment. With participatory approaches, they contribute to local development and support the economic welfare of surrounding communities. This shows that *pesantren* are not only places of learning but also institutions of social transformation (Budiwiranto, 2009).

Environmental awareness has also become part of the *pesantren* agenda. By incorporating ecological education based on prophetic values, students are taught to develop a sense of responsibility for the natural environment. This model nurtures both personal commitment and collective awareness toward sustainability (Purnomo et al., 2024).

The growth of ecological piety (*kesalehan ekologis*) illustrates how Islamic teachings are applied to contemporary issues. The leadership of the *kyai* ensures that environmental ethics are linked to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh al-bi'ah*) and integrated into student practices. This adaptation demonstrates how *pesantren* engage with modern challenges such as ecological preservation (Putri et al., 2023).

Adaptive leadership by the *kyai* is equally significant in the modernization of *pesantren*. In the face of globalization, leaders must integrate classical traditions with new demands. A leadership model that is responsive while safeguarding tradition allows *pesantren* to remain influential and culturally grounded (Hasyim, 2020).

The promotion of religious moderation also reflects the role of *pesantren* in strengthening harmony in diverse societies. By fostering tolerance, inclusive dialogue, and peaceful coexistence, *pesantren* support social cohesion. These efforts reinforce their identity as institutions that uphold religious values while contributing to the unity of the nation (Athoillah et al., 2024).

B. The Positive and Negative Impacts of *Yahanu* in the Perspective of Pesantren Education and Character Theory

The phenomenon of *yahanu*, often understood as an attitude of arrogance or exaggerated self-confidence, represents a complex social reality within pesantren education. This attitude can emerge when students attempt to showcase intellectual or social dominance over their peers. While at first glance it may appear to be a negative expression of pride, in the pesantren context it can also stimulate competitiveness that contributes to character development. According to Anam et al. (2019), pesantren education aims not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to internalize humanitarian and moral values, making the interpretation of behaviors like *yahanu* a crucial part of moral pedagogy.

From a positive perspective, *yahanu* may serve as a motivator for students to enhance their competence. When students feel compelled to demonstrate their abilities, they may dedicate more time to studying and developing skills, thereby fostering academic growth. Sulhan & Hakim, (2023) highlight that strong character cultures within pesantren can emancipate educational management and improve student quality. In this regard, *yahanu* can be reframed as a mechanism that encourages persistence and ambition, values that can be cultivated into constructive habits when properly guided.

Another benefit of *yahanu* is the cultivation of self-confidence. For many students in pesantren, self-assurance is necessary to thrive in environments that demand active participation in religious, intellectual, and social activities. Exhibiting confidence, even if perceived as arrogance, can strengthen leadership traits essential for students' future contributions to society. Mujahid (2021) argues that pesantren-based character education grounded in Islamic orthodoxy plays a vital role in creating moderate Muslims who balance confidence with humility, showing the potential for *yahanu* to evolve positively through structured guidance.

However, the negative implications of *yahanu* cannot be overlooked. Excessive pride or superiority can lead to disharmony within the student

community, creating divisions between those who exhibit such behaviors and those who do not. (Sadiah, 2022) emphasizes that maintaining harmony in pesantren education is critical to preventing radicalism and other disruptive tendencies. When *yahanu* crosses into arrogance, it risks undermining the cooperative spirit essential to pesantren learning environments.

A further challenge arises when *yahanu* distorts students' perception of knowledge. Instead of pursuing knowledge for personal growth and communal benefit, students may seek it merely to appear superior, leading to superficial learning. Ma'arif, Rofiq, Kausar, and Hasan (2024) highlight the importance of fostering moderate Islamic character in schools, suggesting that true educational success lies in nurturing humility, intellectual curiosity, and sincerity rather than shallow displays of knowledge. This indicates that unchecked *yahanu* may hinder rather than promote authentic learning.

The social dynamics within pesantren are also deeply affected by the presence of *yahanu*. When students engage in arrogance-driven interactions, it can lead to subtle exclusion or even bullying. Anam et al. (2019) underline that pesantren serve as spaces for moral internalization, where collective solidarity is highly valued. Consequently, *yahanu* can conflict with pesantren's communal ethos if not addressed through character education strategies that stress empathy and compassion.

Teachers and kyai play a central role in transforming *yahanu* from a potentially negative trait into a productive one. Through mentorship, they can redirect arrogance into constructive leadership, where students are encouraged to lead with responsibility and service. Sulhan and Hakim (2023) demonstrate how fostering strong student character cultures contributes to better educational outcomes, emphasizing that guidance is key to managing potentially disruptive traits like *yahanu*.

Technological disruption adds another layer to this phenomenon. In the digital era, students often use online platforms to project self-image, which can amplify *yahanu* behaviors beyond the pesantren walls. Putra et al., (2019) argue that digital literacy education is crucial for santri, particularly to navigate the risks of technology misuse. Addressing *yahanu* in digital spaces is therefore necessary to ensure that confidence expressed online remains aligned with pesantren values of modesty and responsibility.

When examined through character education theory, *yahanu* represents both a challenge and an opportunity. It highlights the thin boundary between confidence and arrogance, requiring pesantren educators to develop pedagogical frameworks that cultivate virtues while curbing excesses. Mujahid (2021) notes that pesantren education has historically succeeded in balancing orthodoxy and moderation, a balance that remains relevant in managing contemporary issues such as *yahanu*.

The management of *yahanu* can also be linked to broader strategies of preventing extremism in pesantren. By fostering environments where pride is balanced by humility and mutual respect, pesantren can reduce risks of exclusivism or intolerance. Sadiah (2022) emphasizes that radicalism prevention in pesantren requires the nurturing of inclusive character traits, which may be undermined if arrogance goes unchecked. Thus, managing *yahanu* is essential to maintaining pesantren's role as a center of moderation and peace.

At the same time, pesantren leaders can leverage *yahanu* as a pedagogical tool. Encouraging students to express confidence in their ideas during debates, discussions, or public speaking activities can transform arrogance into intellectual courage. (Ma'arif et al., 2024) highlight that developing moderate Islamic character requires creating spaces where students can express themselves while learning humility, which aligns with the educational goal of channeling *yahanu* positively.

In the context of globalization, the way *yahanu* is managed reflects the adaptability of pesantren education in balancing tradition and modernity. Anam et al. (2019) stress that pesantren remain key institutions for moral education, and their ability to contextualize traits like *yahanu* determines how effectively they shape students for modern challenges. The duality of *yahanu* illustrates that pesantren are not static but continuously negotiate values to respond to evolving social realities.

Ultimately, the phenomenon of *yahanu* underscores the importance of comprehensive character education in pesantren. While it carries risks of arrogance and division, it also presents opportunities for fostering confidence, leadership, and resilience when properly guided. The challenge lies in balancing these dimensions so that students emerge as individuals who embody humility and strength simultaneously. As highlighted across recent studies (Mujahid, 2021; Sulhan & Hakim, 2023; Ma'arif et al., 2024), pesantren education must continue to refine its strategies for transforming potentially negative traits like *yahanu* into sources of positive character formation and social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the *yahanu* phenomenon at Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School, it can be concluded that this attitude is a complex social mechanism with a dual impact on the process of student character formation.

On the one hand, *yahanu* has the potential for positive impacts by encouraging motivation, healthy competition, self-confidence, and leadership qualities in students. When properly guided by teachers and kyai, this attitude can become a valuable asset that prepares students to become confident individuals ready to lead in society.

On the other hand, *yahanu* also carries the risk of negative consequences if left unmanaged, such as creating social distance, eroding solidarity, triggering conflict, and

promoting superficial learning for the sake of image-building. This runs counter to the values of harmony and humility that are the foundation of pesantren life.

The central role of teachers and kyai as mentors, role models, and regulators is key to channeling yahanu in a positive direction. Through consistent guidance and modeling, students' self-confidence can be shaped without descending into arrogance. This phenomenon also demonstrates how language and everyday social interaction in the pesantren function as effective tools for behavioral evaluation and control.

Overall, this research affirms that character formation in pesantren is the result of ongoing social dynamics, not merely a product of the formal curriculum. Yahanu reflects the natural tension between self-confidence and humility, which must be managed wisely to produce graduates who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and spiritually mature, and prepared to become ethical leaders.

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