

**INTEGRATING CHARACTER AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN
SCOUT EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE GONTOR MODEL**

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of character education and experiential learning within scout education using the Gontor model as a case study. Character education remains a key concern in contemporary education, yet many institutions struggle to implement value formation in sustainable and practice-oriented ways. This research employs a qualitative case study approach involving interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore how scouting functions as a medium for character formation within a holistic boarding school system. The findings reveal that scouting operates as a structured experiential platform where discipline, leadership, responsibility, and cooperation are internalized through recurring real-life activities. The effectiveness of the model is supported by institutional coherence, including mentorship systems, peer leadership structures, and value-based boarding culture. This study contributes by conceptualizing scouting as an institutionalized experiential learning ecosystem rather than a supplementary extracurricular activity. The findings suggest that sustainable character education requires systemic integration between experiential programs and institutional culture. The study offers practical insights for educational institutions seeking to strengthen holistic character education through structured experiential learning.

Keywords: character education, experiential learning, scouting education, holistic education, boarding school.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in response to growing moral and social challenges among youth.⁶ Educational institutions are increasingly expected not only to develop academic competencies but also to cultivate ethical values, responsibility, and social awareness among students.⁷ This shift reflects a broader recognition that education must address holistic human development, integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions to prepare learners for complex societal realities.

In recent years, experiential learning has gained significant attention as an effective approach for strengthening character education. Unlike traditional didactic instruction, experiential learning emphasizes active participation, reflection, and real-life engagement, enabling students to internalize values through lived experiences rather than abstract concepts.⁸ Empirical studies demonstrate that experience-based learning contributes to the development of discipline, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility, suggesting its strong potential as a medium for sustainable character formation.⁹ Consequently, integrating experiential approaches into educational systems has been widely recommended to enhance both personal and social competencies.

⁶ Handoko, H., Sartono, E. K. E., & Retnawati, H. (2024). The implementation of character education in schools. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar*, 7(4), 619–631.

⁷ Simbolon, B. R. (2024). Character formation through education: A review of educational philosophy on values and virtue. *Khazanah Pendidikan Islam*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.15575/kpi.v6i1.37887>

⁸ Setiyatna, H., Mahmud, N., Astutik, Y., & Muhkam, M. F. (2025). Experience-based learning approaches in strengthening character education. *Asian Journal of Applied Education*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.55927/ajae.v4i4.15581>

⁹ Faslia, F., Salsafira, S., Sabaria, S., Rhamadani, S. S., & Putri, A. (2024). Character formation through experiential learning in elementary education. *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research*, 4(4), 14669–14676.

Within this context, scouting education represents a particularly relevant platform for integrating character formation and experiential learning. Scout activities typically involve outdoor challenges, teamwork, leadership training, and problem-solving tasks that foster independence and resilience. Research indicates that extracurricular and activity-based educational models provide meaningful opportunities for internalizing character values through practice-oriented learning environments.¹⁰ Such models highlight the importance of structured experiential programs in shaping students' moral and social dispositions. Islamic boarding schools offer a unique environment where experiential learning and character education can be systematically integrated. The holistic structure of boarding education enables the alignment of academic instruction, daily routines, and extracurricular activities into a unified value-based system. Recent studies on Gontor-based institutions reveal that character formation is embedded not only in classroom instruction but also in institutional traditions, leadership practices, and co-curricular activities such as scouting.¹¹ This integrative model allows character values to be practiced continuously, creating a sustained process of internalization.

Despite growing interest in experiential and character-based education, limited studies have specifically examined how scouting functions as a structured pedagogical mechanism within holistic boarding school systems. Most existing research discusses character education broadly without focusing on the operational integration between experiential pedagogy and institutional culture. This gap suggests the need for deeper exploration of models that successfully combine structured character formation with experiential learning environments.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the integration of character education and experiential learning within scout education by examining the Gontor educational model. By analyzing how scouting operates as a systematic platform for value internalization, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for integrating experiential learning into character education. The findings are expected to provide theoretical insights and practical implications for educators, policymakers, and institutions seeking to design holistic character education systems.

B. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the integration of character education and experiential learning within scout education at Gontor. A qualitative case study is particularly appropriate for investigating complex educational phenomena within their real-life context,¹² allowing researchers to capture holistic insights into institutional practices and cultural dynamics.¹³ This design enables in-depth exploration of how experiential learning operates as a structured pedagogical mechanism in a boarding school environment.

Qualitative case studies are widely used in contemporary educational research to examine innovative learning models, as they provide rich contextual understanding and allow for the exploration of processes, meanings, and lived experiences.¹⁴ Such an approach is especially relevant for experiential and character-based education, where values are embedded in practices and institutional traditions rather than measurable variables.

The research was conducted at Gontor, an Islamic boarding school known for its holistic educational system integrating academic instruction, character formation, and co-curricular activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research focus. The participants included scout trainers, teachers, dormitory mentors, and senior students actively involved in scouting programs.

¹⁰ Fetrimen, F., & Yulianti, Y. (2023). The implementation of extracurricular activities based on character education. *Ta'dib Journal*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.31958/jt.v26i2.10225>

¹¹ Hidayah, A. N., Jaenullah, J., & Izzah, N. (2025). Implementing holistic education through annual activities to foster character at Gontor Putri. *International Journal on Advanced Science, Education, and Religion*, 8(3), 191–199. <https://doi.org/10.33648/ijoaser.v8i3.1169>.

¹² Karadayı, Z., & Evin Gencel, İ. (2024). A case study on experiential learning integrated with virtual reality technology in teacher education. *International Journal of Educational Studies and Policy*, 5(1), 20–37. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11122954>

¹³ Gómez Sota, F., Pérez Alfonso, L., & Alabau Tejada, N. (2024). Methodological design of case study research based on innovative learning. *Journal of Management and Business Education*, 7(2), 335–356. <https://doi.org/10.35564/jmbe.2024.0019>.

¹⁴ Abrar, M., Ranjan, R., Zhang, R., & Green, T. (2025). Innovative learning models in diverse educational settings: A qualitative case study approach. *Journal International Inspire Education Technology*, 4(1), 20–29.

Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative educational studies to capture information-rich participants who possess deep experiential knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation.¹⁵ This strategy ensures that data reflect authentic institutional practices and experiential dynamics within scouting education.

Data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques, including In-depth interviews with educators and student leaders, Participant observation of scouting activities and training sessions, Document analysis of institutional guidelines, scouting curricula, and educational materials. The use of multiple data sources enables triangulation, which enhances the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings by validating patterns across different forms of evidence.¹⁶ Observational methods are particularly important in experiential learning research, as they allow direct examination of real-life practices and behavioral interactions.¹⁷

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and conceptual themes related to character formation and experiential learning. The analysis followed three stages: data reduction, coding, and theme development. Open coding was initially applied to categorize raw data, followed by axial coding to establish relationships between emerging themes. Thematic analysis is widely adopted in qualitative educational studies for interpreting complex narrative data and generating meaningful conceptual insights.¹⁸ This approach allows researchers to move beyond descriptive accounts toward analytical interpretations that contribute to theory development.

To ensure research rigor, several strategies were employed: by data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking to validate interpretations with participants, thick description to enhance contextual

¹⁵Delany, C., Illing, J., McIlroy, M., et al. (2025). Exploring the lived experience of faculty implementing case-based learning: A phenomenological study. *BMC Medical Education*, 25, 892. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-025-07364-8>

¹⁶ Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2020). School leadership models: What do we know? *School Leadership & Management*, 40(5), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1690701>

¹⁷ Firmansyah, H., Putri, A. E., & Wiyono, H. (2025). Implementation of experiential learning to enhance students' historical thinking skills. *Qalamuna: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama*, 17(1), 777–792. <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v17i1.7193>

¹⁸ Kushnir, I. (2025). Thematic analysis in the area of education: a practical guide. *Cogent Education*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2471645>

transferability. These techniques are recommended in contemporary qualitative research to strengthen credibility, dependability, and interpretive validity.¹⁹ Establishing methodological trustworthiness is essential in case study research, particularly when examining value-based educational systems.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the research objectives and provided voluntary consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study by using pseudonyms and secure data storage. Ethical integrity is a key requirement in qualitative educational research, especially when involving institutional settings and student participants.²⁰

Tabel 1. Research Participants

<i>No</i>	<i>Participant Code</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Involvement in Scouting</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Data Source</i>
1	P1	Scout Trainer	Leads scouting training and outdoor activities	10 years	Interview, Observation
2	P2	Teacher	Integrates character values into classroom and scouting programs	8 years	Interview
3	P3	Dormitory Mentor	Supervises daily boarding life and mentoring	12 years	Interview, Observation
4	P4	Scout Coordinator	Designs scouting curriculum and evaluation	7 years	Interview, Document Analysis
5	P5	Senior Student Leader	Leads scouting teams and peer mentoring	3 years	Interview, Observation
6	P6	Senior Student Member	Active participant in scouting activities	2 years	Interview
7	P7	Institutional Administrator	Oversees character education policies	9 years	Interview, Document Analysis

¹⁹ Thomas, M. B., Muscat, A., Zuccolo, A., Luguetti, C. N., & Watt, A. (2025). Navigating pedagogical innovation in education. *Innovative Higher Education*.

²⁰ Fadiyatunnisa, W., & Heriannngtyas, N. L. R. (2023). Implementasi Kegiatan Gerakan Pramuka Dalam Membentuk Karakter Peserta Didik Anggota Gerakan Pramuka Di Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, 2(1), 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.51875/jispe.v6i01.630>

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Integration of Character Education and Experiential Learning

The findings reveal that scouting education at Gontor functions as an integrative platform where character education and experiential learning are systematically embedded. Character values are not delivered through formal instruction alone but are internalized through structured activities such as outdoor training, team-based challenges, and leadership simulations.²¹ These activities enable students to learn values through action, reinforcing the effectiveness of experience-based character formation.²²

Participants consistently emphasized that experiential scouting activities provide meaningful contexts for practicing responsibility, cooperation, and discipline. Unlike classroom-based moral instruction, scouting activities involve real-life challenges that require immediate decision-making and collective accountability. This aligns with recent findings suggesting that experiential environments enhance value internalization by connecting cognitive understanding with behavioral practice.²³



Figure 1. Scouting Activities in Boarding School Context

2. Scouting as a Structured Character Formation System

²¹ Farhana, N., Rizqi, B., & Tiara, C. (2024). The role of scout extracurricular activities on the formation of student leadership character at boarding school. *Journal of Social and Scientific Education*, 5(1), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.58230/josse.v1i1.29>.

²² Hanifah, D., & Hasibuan, A. R. (2025, January). Pembentukan Karakter Siswa Melalui Pendidikan Kepramukaan, *Jurnal Inovasi Pembelajaran Dan Pendidikan Islam [JIPPI]* (Vol. 3, Issue 1, pp. 07–11)..

²³ Hidayati, A. N. (2021). Peran Pendidikan Kepramukaan Sebagai Media Pembentukan Karakter Kepemimpinan Siswa Sekolah Dasar. *J.U.R.M.I.A.: Jurnal Riset Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, 1(1), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.32665/jurmia.v1i1.191>

The study found that scouting at Gontor is not treated as an extracurricular activity but as an integral component of the educational system. Institutional policies, training modules, and mentorship structures ensure that scouting activities are systematically aligned with character formation goals. Scout trainers and dormitory mentors play a central role in guiding reflective learning processes, ensuring that experiences translate into moral insights.

This structured integration reflects a broader trend in holistic education where co-curricular activities serve as pedagogical extensions of classroom learning.²⁴ The findings indicate that institutional alignment between values, activities, and leadership is critical for sustaining character education beyond symbolic implementation.

3. Development of Leadership and Social Responsibility

Another major finding concerns the role of scouting in fostering leadership and social responsibility. Students reported that rotational leadership roles within scouting units provide opportunities to practice decision-making, conflict resolution, and team management. These experiences contribute to the development of adaptive leadership skills grounded in ethical responsibility.

Observational data further demonstrate that leadership training occurs through progressive responsibility. Junior students initially participate as team members, while senior students assume mentoring roles. This tiered structure enables experiential leadership development, consistent with studies highlighting the importance of gradual responsibility transfer in character-based education (Delany et al., 2025).²⁵

4. Experiential Learning and Student Independence

The results also show that scouting significantly contributes to student independence. Activities such as survival training, outdoor navigation, and self-managed group projects require students to solve problems autonomously. Participants reported that these experiences cultivate resilience and confidence, particularly in unfamiliar situations.

²⁴ Israyanti, I. & etal. (2025). Peran Kepramukaan Sebagai Sarana Pembelajaran Karakter, Jurnal Ilmiah dan Karya Mahasiswa (Vol. 3, Issue 1, pp. 129-135,). <https://doi.org/10.54066/jikma.v3i1.2971>

²⁵ Lala, A., & Rohyana, H. (2025). Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter Melalui Kegiatan Ekstrakurikuler Pramuka Di Sekolah Dasar. Journal Of Islamic Primary Education, 6(1), 1–13.

This finding supports recent research indicating that experiential learning environments promote autonomy and self-regulation by exposing learners to authentic challenges (Gómez Sota et al., 2024).²⁶ In the Gontor context, independence is further reinforced by the boarding school system, which provides continuous opportunities for experiential engagement.

5. Institutional Culture and Sustainability of Character Formation

The sustainability of character formation appears closely linked to institutional culture. The findings suggest that scouting is effective because it operates within a broader ecosystem of value-based education, including dormitory life, daily routines, and mentor modeling. Participants highlighted that consistency between institutional values and lived experiences strengthens long-term character internalization.

This result aligns with recent studies emphasizing that character education is most effective when embedded within institutional culture rather than isolated programs (Hidayah et al., 2025).²⁷ The Gontor model demonstrates how sustained exposure to value-driven environments enhances the durability of character outcomes.

6. Challenges in Implementation

Despite its strengths, the study identified several challenges. Resource limitations and increasing student enrollment sometimes affect the intensity of experiential programs. Additionally, some participants noted the need for adaptive innovation to integrate digital competencies into traditional scouting frameworks.

These challenges reflect broader issues in experiential education, where scalability and modernization remain persistent concerns (Thomas et al., 2025).²⁸ Addressing these constraints requires strategic planning to preserve core values while adapting to evolving educational demands.

²⁶ Rakhmawati. (2025). Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter Pada Kegiatan Ekstrakurikuler Pramuka. *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan*, 10(3), 2879–2885. <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v10i3.3478>

²⁷ Rozi, F., & Hasanah, U. (2021). Nilai-nilai Pendidikan Karakter; Penguatan Berbasis Kegiatan Ekstrakurikuler Pramuka di Pesantren. *MANAZHIM*, 3(1), 110–126. <https://doi.org/10.36088/manazhim.v3i1.1075>

²⁸ Singha, R., & Singha, S. (2024). Application of Experiential, Inquiry-Based, Problem-Based, and Project-Based Learning in Sustainable Education: In C. L. Goi (Ed.), *Practice, Progress, and Proficiency in Sustainability* (pp. 109–128). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9859-0.ch006>

The findings of this study demonstrate that scout education within the Gontor model represents a structured integration of character education and experiential learning rather than an incidental extracurricular activity. This aligns with contemporary perspectives that emphasize character formation as a holistic process requiring consistent experiential engagement²⁹ beyond classroom instruction.³⁰ Recent studies highlight that character development becomes more sustainable when embedded in authentic activities that allow students to internalize values through lived experiences rather than cognitive transmission alone.³¹

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings support the experiential learning paradigm, which asserts that concrete experiences, reflective observation, and behavioral application form the foundation of durable character internalization. Empirical research shows that experiential character education produces longer-lasting behavioral change when implemented systematically within institutional structures rather than as sporadic interventions.³² The Gontor model demonstrates this principle through continuous scouting cycles that integrate discipline, leadership, and communal responsibility into daily boarding school life.

Moreover, this study reinforces the growing body of literature emphasizing the institutional role in managing character education. Recent Indonesian research indicates that character formation is more effective when supported by governance structures, leadership commitment,³³ and program continuity.³⁴ In this regard,

²⁹ Yusuf, F. A., & Fajari, L. E. W. (2025). Character quality development in future-oriented education: A case study of Indonesian nature-based schools. *Education in the 21st Century Journal*, 14, e2025029.

³⁰ Safitri, I., Andriyanti, E., Ansyari, R., et al. (2025). Character education in Indonesia: Do integrated Islamic schools outperform public schools? *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 16(1), 251–270.

³¹ Kaosim, J., Wijakkanalan, S., & Sirisuthi, C. (2025). Development of an integrated learning experience model through storytelling to promote executive functions. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 14(6), 435–446.

³² AJAE. (2025). Experiential character education and long-term value internalization. *Asian Journal of Applied Education*, 4(4), 557–570.

³³ Rafliizar, C., Niswanto, N., & Hizir, H. (2025). Managing curriculum for environmental character education: Challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Applied and Industrial Sciences*, 4(2).

³⁴ Mawaddah, H., Haumahu, C. P., & Korlefura, C. (2025). The effect of character education on student academic achievement: A literature review. *Indonesian Journal of Education*, 5(1), 199–207.

Gontor's structured scouting system reflects a management-driven approach where values are operationalized into routines, hierarchies, and peer leadership mechanisms. This finding strengthens the argument that character education must be managed as an organizational system rather than treated as a pedagogical add-on.

This study contributes to the literature by bridging three theoretical domains: character education, experiential learning, and faith-based holistic education. While previous studies have examined experiential character education in nature-based schools³⁵ and integrated Islamic education separately,³⁶ this research highlights how scouting functions as a pedagogical bridge that operationalizes both domains simultaneously. The findings suggest that experiential religious schooling environments may offer a more immersive platform for character internalization due to the continuity between formal instruction and lived experience.

The primary novelty of this research lies in conceptualizing scouting not merely as an extracurricular activity but as an institutionalized character formation ecosystem. Unlike prior studies that frame experiential learning as program-based interventions, this study reveals a model where experiential learning is embedded structurally within the educational culture. The Gontor model demonstrates three distinctive novelties: (1) Institutionalized experiential continuity – character formation occurs through recurring, structured scouting cycles rather than short-term programs. (2) Integration of leadership ecology – peer leadership systems function as moral transmission channels. (3) Value internalization through lived discipline – daily routines serve as continuous experiential laboratories for character cultivation.

These elements extend current experiential learning discourse by proposing that the sustainability of character education depends not only on pedagogy but also on institutional ecology. This perspective resonates with recent calls for systemic

³⁵ Mohammad Muslih, Syarifah Syarifah, Riza Ashari, Saiful Anwar, Harisman H, International Islamic Youth Education: Character Development and Intercultural Competence in World Muslim Scout Jamboree 2025, *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 43(1), 221-228, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15294/jpp.v43i1.42798>

³⁶ Syarifah, F. I., Shofiyah, Shulhan, & Susekti, D. K. (2023). Formation of Creativity Skills in Scouting Scout Groups (Case Study at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 2 Academic Year 2022-2023)". *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies*, 6(4), 347–361. <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v6i4.809>.

approaches to character education that integrate curriculum, culture, and governance into a unified developmental framework.³⁷

The findings suggest that holistic character education requires a shift from program-based models toward ecosystem-based educational design. Institutions seeking to strengthen character outcomes may benefit from embedding experiential structures into organizational culture rather than relying solely on curricular innovation. This insight is particularly relevant for Islamic and boarding school contexts where lived experience plays a central role in value transmission.

Overall, the study positions the Gontor scouting model as an example of experiential character education that is structurally sustained, culturally embedded, and institutionally managed. By integrating experiential learning with organizational design, the findings contribute to expanding contemporary discourse on how character education can move beyond rhetoric into operational educational systems.

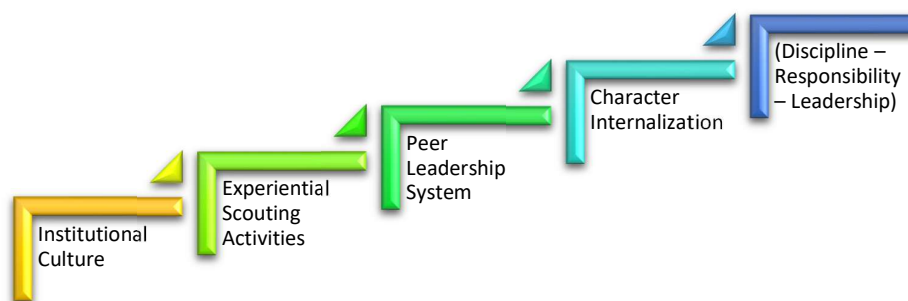


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Scouting-Based Character Education

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that scouting education within the Gontor model represents a structured integration of character education and experiential learning that extends beyond conventional extracurricular frameworks. The findings indicate that character formation becomes more effective when experiential activities are systematically embedded within institutional routines, leadership structures, and cultural practices. Rather than functioning as isolated programs, scouting in the Gontor

³⁷ INJOE. (2025). Strategy for strengthening character education through independent learning curriculum. *Indonesian Journal of Education*, 4(3), 325–335.

context operates as a sustained experiential platform where values are internalized through repeated practice, peer interaction, and lived discipline.

The study also highlights the importance of institutional management in sustaining character education. The effectiveness of the model lies not only in experiential pedagogy but also in its organizational coherence, where governance, mentorship, and daily boarding life reinforce the same value system. This confirms that sustainable character education requires systemic integration between curriculum, co-curricular activities, and institutional culture.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes by positioning scouting as an institutionalized experiential learning ecosystem that bridges character education and holistic schooling. The findings expand current discussions on experiential learning by emphasizing that long-term character internalization depends on structural continuity and cultural immersion rather than short-term programmatic interventions.

Practically, the study suggests that educational institutions seeking to strengthen character education should move toward ecosystem-based models that integrate experiential learning into organizational design. Embedding structured experiential activities within school culture may provide a more sustainable pathway for developing leadership, responsibility, and moral integrity among students.

Overall, the Gontor scouting model offers a relevant framework for developing holistic character education that is structurally sustained, culturally embedded, and institutionally managed. Future research may explore the adaptability of this model across diverse educational contexts and examine its long-term impact on student character development and leadership outcomes.

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