



Islamic Character Education in Indonesian Elementary Schools: Its Role in Students' Moral Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic character education in the moral development of elementary school students. The background of this research is grounded in the importance of character formation from an early age as a response to the moral crisis among the younger generation. Islamic character education is considered relevant because it is based on the values of the Quran and Sunnah, which shape personality holistically. This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research type combined with descriptive analysis. Data were obtained from books, scientific journals, and educational policy documents, then analyzed using content analysis techniques to examine the relationship between the concept of Islamic character education and children's moral development. The results indicate that Islamic character education plays an important role in shaping students' morality through the internalization of moral values encompassing relationships with Allah, fellow human beings, and the environment. Effective implementation integrates the aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, thereby optimizing the child's innate potential (fitrah) and forming individuals of noble character.

Keywords: *Islamic Character Education, Moral Development, Elementary School*

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INTRODUCTION

The manuscript should be the original work either as a research or reference studies which have never been published in any form of publication. The manuscript is single-spaced. The margin text from the top, left, right, and bottom are 3 cm, 3 cm, 3 cm and 3 respectively. The manuscript is written using Book Antiqua-11. The suggested organization of the paper consists of: Introduction - Methods - Results and Discussion - Conclusion. Each part should explicitly declare the contents.

In accordance with the emphasis of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, students are required to internalize national character values such as honesty, tolerance, religiosity, discipline, hard work, independence, creativity, curiosity, and social and environmental responsibility (Munawaroh, 2024). Strengthening these values is increasingly essential in facing global challenges, where individuals need to excel not only intellectually but also emotionally and morally. This aligns with Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which states that the goal of education is to holistically develop students' potential, encompassing spiritual, personality, and moral dimensions. Therefore, character education is inseparable from the learning process, especially at the elementary school level. Its implementation can be achieved through habituation, teacher role modeling, and a supportive learning environment focused on moral values (Kemendikbudristek, 2017). Meanwhile, social reality reflects a moral crisis among the younger generation in the era of globalization. Problems such as student brawls, drug abuse, free association, and declining mutual respect indicate a deterioration of youth character. This situation calls for character education strategies as a defense against the negative impacts of modernization (Zuhri et al., 2026).

Consistent character education has proven to help students understand moral values and shape behavior in accordance with social norms. In Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-

majority country, character education based on Islamic values is highly relevant. Values from the Quran and Hadith not only serve as moral guidelines but also form a complete individual (*insan kamil*) encompassing faith (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), and morality (*akhlak*). Islamic character education emphasizes the internalization of values through habituation and daily role modeling, not merely as knowledge (Wasehudin et al., 2024).

Institutions such as Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools (SDIT) serve as successful examples of integrating these values into learning. The elementary school age (6–12 years) is a crucial period for forming a child's character and morality, as cognitive and social development accelerates and they begin to understand social norms. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory states that children in this phase are at the conventional moral stage, where they absorb values from environmental expectations. Therefore, instilling character at this time is vital as it has a long-term impact on behavior and personality (Pratiwi & Wuryandani, 2025). Based on the foregoing, this research is essential for in-depth analysis of the role of Islamic character education in the moral development of elementary school students. The study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions toward a more effective character education model suited to the demands of the era.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research type combined with descriptive analysis (Creswell, 2016). This approach was chosen because the study aims to examine in depth the concept of Islamic character education and its role in the moral development of elementary school students based on various relevant scientific literature sources. Data in this study were obtained from books, scientific journals, and educational policy documents related to character education, children's moral development, and the perspective of Islamic education. The data collection technique was carried out through documentary study, while data analysis used content analysis techniques, namely by identifying, classifying, and interpreting information to find the relationship between the concept of Islamic character education and the theory of moral development and its implementation in elementary schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Character Education in Islam

Character education in Islam is inseparable from the concept of "morals," which is deeply rooted in Islamic scholarly tradition. Imam Al-Ghazali, in his *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Theology of the Divine), defines morals as a spiritual quality that encourages spontaneous, thoughtless action. This concept emphasizes that good character is not merely external behavior, but rather an inner state inherent in personality (Hanim, 2025).

From an Islamic perspective, character education has three interrelated dimensions. First, *hablum minallah* (vertical relationship with God), encompassing faith, piety, and worship. Second, *hablum minannas* (horizontal relationship with humans), encompassing honesty, justice, compassion, and mutual respect. Third, *hablum minal'alam* (relationship with nature), which teaches responsibility as a caliph on earth (Sari et al., 2021). These three must be balanced in Islamic education.

Islamic character education is also unique because its teachings are sourced from a transcendental perspective. Unlike secular approaches that rely on human philosophy, this approach is based on divine revelation (the Quran and Sunnah) as the highest value. This approach provides a profound spiritual dimension, where morality arises from a sense of responsibility to Allah SWT, not merely social pressure (Ramadhaniyah, 2023)

Moral Development of Elementary School-Age Children

According to the National Education System Law Number 20 of 2003, education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and process that enable students to actively develop their potential. The goal is to shape individuals with spiritual and religious strength, self-control, a mature personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed for themselves, society, the nation, and the state (Ministry of National Education, 2003). The term "moral" itself comes from the Latin word "moralis," which is rooted in the word "mos" (plural:

mores), meaning custom, habit, or social norm (Huliyah, 2021). Etymologically, actions that conform to norms are called moral, while deviant behavior is called immoral, and those who understand and practice these norms are often called moralists. According to Gustian et al. (2024), the goal of moral education is to equip students with an understanding of values within the family, local, and national contexts through customs, so that children can continue to develop their character, make ethical decisions, rationally face social realities, and gain moral experiences that enrich their knowledge.

In educational studies, the most frequently cited theory of moral development is Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, which divides moral development into three levels and six stages. At the pre-conventional level (around 4–10 years of age), children think morally based on immediate consequences, such as punishments and rewards. At the conventional level (around 10–13 years of age), which is the final phase of elementary school, children begin to orient their morality toward the expectations of others and social rules. At the post-conventional level, morality is based on universal principles (Nainggolan & Naibaho, 2022). Meifang (2025) distinguishes two stages of children's morality: heteronomous morality (children view rules as rigid and unchangeable) and autonomous morality (children begin to understand that rules are social constructs that can be mutually agreed upon). Elementary school children in the lower grades (6–8 years old) are generally in the heteronomous stage, while those in the upper grades (9–12 years old) are entering the autonomous stage. Understanding these stages is crucial for designing age-appropriate character education strategies.

From an Islamic perspective, a child's moral development is greatly influenced by the environment (bi'ah) surrounding them. The concept of fitrah teaches that every child is born pure and has a tendency to develop in a good direction. The task of education is to nurture and develop this fitrah through systematic guidance and a conducive environment. A hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) states that every child is born in a state of fitrah, and it is his parents who make him a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian, indicating the important role of the environment in shaping a child's morals (Sapitri et al., 2022).

Model for Implementing Character Education in Elementary Schools

Lickona (1991) proposed three main components of good character education: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These three components must develop in a balanced and interconnected manner for character education to be effective. In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Lickona's model is often adapted by adding a spiritual dimension as a foundation for these three components.

In Indonesia, the implementation of character education in elementary schools is based on Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education (PPK), which emphasizes five core character values: religious, nationalist, independent, cooperative, and integrity. For Islamic schools, religious values serve as the foundation for the other four values and are more deeply instilled through an Islamic curriculum and school culture, ensuring that character education is integrated with Islamic values.

Table 1.1 Research Findings

No	Source/Reference	Research Findings
1.	Al-Ghazali in Hanim (2025)	Morals are traits embedded in the soul that encourage spontaneous action without further consideration.
2.	Sari et al., (2021)	Character education encompasses three main dimensions: <i>hablum minallah</i> (the principle of God), <i>hablum minannas</i> (the principle of nature), and <i>hablum minal'alam</i> (the principle of nature).

3.	Ramadhaniyah, (2023)	Islamic character values are derived from the Quran and Sunnah, which are transcendental.
4.	Nainggolan & Naibaho (2022)	Elementary school children are in the pre-conventional to conventional stage, where morals are influenced by rules and the social environment.
5.	Meifang (2025)	Children experience a development from heteronomous to autonomous morality as they age.
6.	Sapitri et al., (2022)	Children are born with a natural state of nature and develop according to the influence of their educational and family environments.
7.	Lickona (1991)	Effective character education encompasses three components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

Discussion

The literature review presented in the previous section demonstrates that Islamic character education plays a significant role in the moral development of elementary school students. Findings from various sources reveal that the concept of morality in Islam, as proposed by Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, is the primary foundation for character formation, namely, an inner quality that encourages spontaneous noble actions without requiring lengthy deliberation. This aligns with the findings of Hanim (2025), who emphasized that true character is not merely outward behavior, but rather an inner state that is integrated with one's personality.

From the perspective of Islamic education, the literature review reinforces that the three dimensions of human relationships—*hablum minallah*, *hablum minannas*, and *hablum minal'alam*—need to be instilled in a balanced and integrated manner within the Islamic education process (Hanim, 2025). An imbalance between these three dimensions has been shown to result in partial and non-holistic character formation. Students who are strong only in the dimension of ritual worship but weak in social interaction, for example, demonstrate that character education has not fully achieved its goals. Thus, the implementation of Islamic character education in elementary schools must be designed to address all three dimensions simultaneously.

From a moral development perspective, studies of Kohlberg's theory indicate that elementary school students, particularly those aged 10-13, are at a conventional level where morality begins to be oriented toward the expectations of others and social rules (Nainggolan & Naibaho, 2022). This finding confirms that elementary school age is a critical and strategic period for instilling Islamic character values, as during this phase, children are most responsive to value internalization. Similarly, Piaget, in an updated study by Rosyida et al. (2022), emphasized that the transition from heteronomous to autonomous morality that occurs during elementary school provides an opportunity for educators to guide students in a more critical and independent understanding of values.

A literature review also reinforces the relevance of the Islamic concept of *fitrah* as a philosophical foundation for moral education. Sapitri, Rosyadi, and Rahman (2022) demonstrate that every child is born with the potential for goodness that must be nurtured through systematic education and a conducive environment. This has the important implication that the primary task of teachers and schools is not simply to transmit moral knowledge, but rather to create an educational ecosystem that allows children's innate nature to develop optimally.

At the implementation level, the literature review indicates that Lickona's model, which emphasizes three components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, remains relevant in the context of contemporary Islamic education. In their recent research, Purwati, Japar, Qomariyah, and Tentama (2024), Purwati, Japar, Qomariyah, and Tentama (2024), found that these three components are closely interrelated and must be developed simultaneously so that character education produces students who not only understand moral values but also feel them and embody them in concrete actions. In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, this model is reinforced by the Strengthening Character Education (PPK) policy, enacted through Presidential Regulation Number 87 of 2017, which places religious values as the foundation of all other character values.

Overall, this literature review confirms that Islamic character education has a comprehensive, holistic, and relevant framework to support the moral development of elementary school students. The excellence of Islamic character education lies in its transcendental spiritual dimension, where moral actions are driven not solely by social pressure but by a deep awareness of responsibility to Allah SWT (Ramadhaniyah, 2023). This dimension distinguishes Islamic-based character education from secular models and makes it more robust and sustainable in shaping students' personalities.

CONCLUSION

Islamic character education plays a very important role in shaping the moral development of elementary school students because it is based on moral values sourced from the Quran and Sunnah. This concept encompasses the balance between relationships with Allah (*hablum minallah*), fellow humans (*hablum minannas*), and the environment (*hablum minal'alam*), thereby forming students' character holistically, not only from a behavioral aspect but also from an inner awareness. Furthermore, Islamic character education is highly relevant to be applied at the elementary school age because at this stage children are at a strategic phase of moral development. With the support of a conducive educational environment and the application of a learning model that integrates moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, Islamic character education can optimize children's innate potential (*fitrah*) and form individuals of noble character who are responsible in social and spiritual life.

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