



Strengthening Students' Character and Social Development through Islamic Values Internalization in Aqidah Akhlak Learning

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Islamic values internalization through Aqidah Akhlak learning in strengthening students' character and social development within madrasah education. A qualitative descriptive design was employed at Al-Khairiyah Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Jambi City, Indonesia, involving 20 purposively selected participants comprising one school principal, two Aqidah Akhlak teachers, and seventeen students. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings identified four interconnected patterns of Islamic values internalization: value integration through learning activities, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and the development of a religious school culture. These practices functioned as continuous educational mechanisms that reinforced students' moral understanding and behavioral adaptation. The internalization process was influenced by differences in students' awareness, peer influence, social media exposure, and limited parental support. Overall, these practices contributed to the development of discipline, responsibility, politeness, religious awareness, empathy, cooperation, and positive social interaction among students. The findings demonstrate that the internalization of Islamic values through Aqidah Akhlak learning integrates moral knowledge, character formation, and social development into madrasah educational practices.

Keywords: Aqidah Akhlak Learning; Character Development; Islamic Values Internalization; Madrasah Education; Social Development.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educational institutions have increasingly faced challenges related to students' moral behavior, social interaction, and psychosocial well-being amid rapid technological advancement, globalization, and changing social environments [1], [2]. Within school settings, declining discipline, reduced empathy, weak social awareness, bullying behavior, and limited positive peer interaction have become important concerns affecting students' educational experiences and social welfare [3], [4]. These conditions indicate that education should not focus exclusively on academic achievement but should also provide systematic opportunities for developing moral character and socially responsible behavior [5].

Within madrasah education, this responsibility is closely connected to the internalization of Islamic values [6]. Madrasahs are expected to integrate intellectual, moral, and spiritual development through educational practices that enable students to understand and enact values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, cooperation, respect, and religiosity [7], [8]. Rather than functioning solely as religious knowledge, these values can provide behavioral orientations for students' everyday interactions and contribute to the development of supportive relationships, collective responsibility, and positive participation within the school community [9], [10].

The need for value-based education has become increasingly relevant as students interact with complex social and digital environments [11]. Digital exposure may provide educational opportunities, but intensive engagement with social media and online environments can also compete with school routines, face-to-face interaction, and students' attention to social responsibilities [12], [13]. Such conditions highlight the importance of educational environments capable of continuously reinforcing moral and social values across classroom learning, school culture, and interpersonal interaction [14], [15]. In this context, Islamic values can contribute not only to individual moral development but also to empathy, cooperation, mutual respect, social awareness, and students' broader educational well-being.

Value internalization therefore represents a process through which moral principles move from conceptual understanding toward personal acceptance and behavioral practice [16]. Muhammad, Abitolkha and Dodi [17], for example, conceptualized value internalization as a process influenced by individual motivation and the gradual integration of values into personal orientations. In educational settings, this process can occur through repeated learning experiences, behavioral reinforcement, social interaction, and exposure to significant role models [18]. Accordingly, internalization cannot be reduced to students' ability to identify moral principles; it also concerns whether these principles become reflected in their attitudes, relationships, and everyday behavior.

Aqidah Akhlak learning occupies a strategic position in this process because it explicitly connects Islamic beliefs and moral principles with students' behavioral development [19], [20]. Syafi'i et al. [21] demonstrated that integrating Aqidah Akhlak learning can strengthen the quality of Islamic education by connecting religious knowledge with moral formation. Similarly, Fiqih, Hanief, and Sutarno [22] showed that character development through Akidah Akhlak learning can be supported by translating religious principles into students' behavioral practices. These studies establish the importance of religious learning for character formation; however, their primary emphasis remains on moral and religious

outcomes, leaving less explanation of how the internalization process simultaneously shapes students' interpersonal and social development.

Other studies have examined particular mechanisms through which values are reinforced. Adıgüzel et al. [23] demonstrated the importance of teacher role modeling in supporting students' self-regulatory development, while Solihah, Sugara, and Fathoni [24] emphasized teachers' roles and habituation practices in religious character education. Research on religious habituation has similarly shown that repeated religious practices and structured routines can strengthen students' religious character and behavioral consistency [25]. Meanwhile, studies concerning school culture indicate that values embedded in the broader educational environment can reinforce behavioral development beyond formal classroom instruction [26], [27]. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that teacher role modeling, habituation, learning activities, and school culture are important mechanisms of character education. Nevertheless, these mechanisms have frequently been examined separately rather than as interconnected processes within the same madrasah educational environment.

Previous research has also tended to position character formation as the principal outcome of value-based education. For example, Toyyibudin and Zulfiquri [28] emphasized discipline through Aqidah Akhlak learning, whereas Nursobah et al. [29] focused on religious habituation and religious character development. Tantowi et al. [30] this study explores the application of technology in Islamic boarding school management and its impact on administrative efficiency and educational service quality. Although these studies provide important evidence concerning discipline, religiosity, habituation, and school culture, comparatively less attention has been directed toward how these processes intersect with social outcomes, particularly empathy, cooperation, interpersonal relationships, social awareness, and collective responsibility.

This distinction is important because students experience value internalization within multiple and sometimes competing social contexts. School-based moral guidance may interact with individual readiness, family environments, peer relationships, and digital exposure [31]. Consequently, understanding whether students know Islamic values is insufficient for explaining why some students consistently enact them while others require repeated guidance or demonstrate different behavioral responses. What remains insufficiently explained in the existing literature is how learning, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school culture operate together as mechanisms of Islamic values internalization, how this process is challenged by individual and external social influences, and how it contributes simultaneously to students' character and social development within a madrasah context.

Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualizes Islamic values internalization as a multidimensional educational process rather than an isolated character-education outcome. Its novelty lies in analytically connecting internalization mechanisms, contextual challenges, character development, and social development within a unified framework. In particular, the study examines character outcomes such as discipline, responsibility, and religiosity alongside social outcomes involving empathy, interpersonal relationships, and cooperation. This integrated perspective extends previous studies that have predominantly examined individual mechanisms or character outcomes separately.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the processes, challenges, and contributions of Islamic values internalization through Aqidah Akhlak learning to students' character and social

development within madrasah education. Specifically, it examines how Islamic values are internalized through learning activities, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school culture; identifies individual and external factors influencing the internalization process; and explores how these processes contribute to students' character formation and social development. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic values internalization as an educational process connecting moral development, interpersonal relationships, and students' broader social experiences within madrasah settings.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the process of Islamic values internalization through Aqidah Akhlak learning in strengthening students' character and social development [32]. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities regarding the implementation of Islamic values within educational settings [33].

Participants and Sampling

The research was conducted at Al-Khairiyah Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah, located in Pasar Jambi District, Jambi City, Indonesia, from October 2025 to March 2026. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the selected informants possessed relevant experiences and knowledge regarding the implementation of Islamic values internalization within the madrasah environment. A total of 20 participants were involved in the study, consisting of one school principal, two Aqidah Akhlak teachers, and seventeen students who participated in learning and religious activities within the school setting.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine religious activities, classroom learning processes, and students' interactions within the school environment. Semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain in-depth information regarding the implementation process, challenges encountered, and the contribution of Islamic values internalization toward students' character and social development. Documentation techniques were utilized to obtain supporting data related to school programs, institutional activities, and relevant educational records.

To provide a systematic overview of the research procedures, the stages of the study are presented in Figure 1.

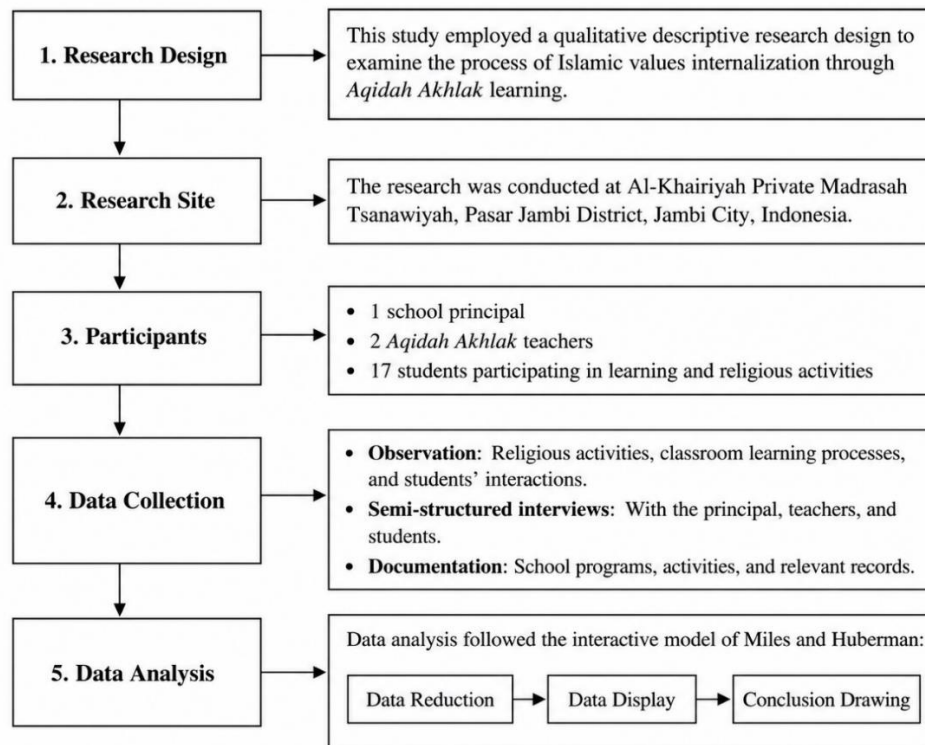


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram of the Study

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [34]. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing relevant information, while data display facilitated systematic interpretation of patterns and themes emerging from the collected data. Conclusions were generated through continuous comparison and interpretation of the findings [35].

To facilitate systematic interpretation of qualitative findings, the interview and observational data were coded and organized through thematic analysis procedures. Initial codes generated from participants' responses were grouped into categories and subsequently developed into broader themes that represented the main findings of the study.

Table 1. Thematic Coding and Data Interpretation Framework

Raw Participant Statements	Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
“Students gradually become more disciplined and responsible because they repeatedly participate in religious activities and observe teachers’ behavior.” (G1)	Discipline improvement; behavioral adaptation; teacher influence	Religious practices and role modeling	Islamic Values Internalization through Learning and Religious Practices
“Students have different levels of awareness and understanding regarding the	Different awareness levels; motivation differences	Individual readiness factors	Challenges in Islamic Values Internalization

Raw Participant Statements	Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
importance of practicing Islamic values.” (G1)			
“Students’ behavior outside school is strongly influenced by family supervision and social environment.” (P1)	Family influence; environmental influence	External social factors	Challenges in Islamic Values Internalization
“Students increasingly demonstrate responsibility and more positive attitudes toward school activities.” (G2)	Responsibility improvement; positive attitude	Personal behavioral development	Students’ Character Development Outcomes
“Students increasingly show concern for others and demonstrate stronger cooperation during school activities.” (G1)	Empathy development; cooperation behavior	Social relationship development	Students’ Social Development Outcomes
Students reported becoming more aware of maintaining positive relationships and helping peers in learning activities.	Social awareness; peer support	Interpersonal interaction	Students’ Social Development Outcomes

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking were employed. Reflexivity was also maintained throughout the research process to minimize researcher bias and strengthen interpretive validity. Ethical considerations were observed, including voluntary participation, confidentiality protection, and informed consent from all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis generated four interconnected themes representing the mechanisms, challenges, and outcomes of Islamic values internalization through Aqidah Akhlak learning. To provide a concise overview of the findings and clarify the relationships among the identified themes, subthemes, data sources, and key analytical findings, the results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Themes, Subthemes, Data Sources, and Key Analytical Findings

Themes	Subthemes	Data Sources	Key Analytical Findings
Theme 1. Islamic Values Internalization	Religious habituation; teacher role modeling;	Teachers (G1–G2), students (S1–S17), principal (P1),	Islamic values were internalized through repeated religious practices, teacher behavioral examples, classroom learning, and school

through Learning and Religious Practices	learning-based value implementation; supportive school culture	observations, documentation	routines. These mechanisms enabled students to move from conceptual understanding toward everyday practice.
Theme 2. Challenges in Islamic Values Internalization	Individual readiness and awareness; behavioral consistency; peer influence; family environment; digital media exposure	Teachers (G1–G2), students (S1–S17), principal (P1), observations	Internalization varied across students and was influenced by differences in awareness, motivation, and behavioral consistency. External influences, particularly peers, family environments, and digital exposure, could reinforce or weaken school-based value formation.
Theme 3. Students' Character Development Outcomes	Discipline; responsibility; religiosity	Teachers (G1–G2), students (S1–S17), principal (P1), observations	Students demonstrated gradual development in discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. Changes generally emerged progressively through repeated participation in structured learning and religious activities rather than as immediate outcomes.
Theme 4. Students' Social Development Outcomes	Empathy; interpersonal relationships; cooperation	Teachers (G1–G2), students (S1–S17), principal (P1), observations	Internalization extended beyond individual character formation to social development, reflected in greater empathy, more positive peer relationships, mutual support, and stronger cooperation during learning and school activities.

The four themes presented in Table 2 are elaborated below using evidence derived from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Theme 1. Islamic Values Internalization through Learning and Religious Practices

The findings revealed that Islamic values internalization through Aqidah Akhlak learning was implemented through interconnected educational practices involving teacher role modeling, religious habituation, structured learning activities, and supportive school culture. Analysis indicated that these practices functioned as continuous mechanisms enabling students to experience Islamic values directly in everyday educational contexts.

The coding process identified several recurrent initial codes including *participation in religious activities*, *teacher behavioral examples*, *daily value reinforcement*, *moral guidance*, and *student practice of values*. These codes were then grouped into categories of *religious habituation*, *teacher role modeling*, and *learning-based value implementation*, which

collectively formed the theme of Islamic values internalization through learning and religious practices.

Observational findings demonstrated that students regularly engaged in collective religious activities before formal classroom sessions, including Qur'an recitation, congregational prayer, classroom moral reminders, and value-based interactions between teachers and students. During classroom activities, teachers frequently reinforced Islamic values not only through instructional explanations but also through direct behavioral examples and interpersonal interactions with students.

A teacher described:

"Students become more accustomed to practicing discipline and responsibility because these values are repeatedly reinforced during learning activities and daily school routines." (G1)

Students also explained that values introduced in Aqidah Akhlak learning were experienced through practical educational activities rather than solely through theoretical instruction.

One student stated:

"We do not only learn religious concepts in class, but we also apply them during prayers, classroom activities, and our interactions with friends." (S2)

The principal further emphasized that the school environment intentionally supported continuous value reinforcement:

"School programs and daily activities are designed so students continuously encounter and practice religious values in their everyday experiences." (P1)

Cross-data comparison indicated a consistent pattern among teachers, students, and school leadership suggesting that Islamic values internalization was not implemented as isolated classroom instruction but as an integrated educational process embedded within learning activities, school routines, and social interaction patterns.

Theme 2. Challenges in Islamic Values Internalization

The findings revealed that the process of Islamic values internalization within Aqidah Akhlak learning was influenced by various interconnected challenges originating from both internal and external dimensions. Coding analysis generated several recurring initial codes including *differences in motivation, variation in personal awareness, inconsistent behavioral adaptation, peer influence, digital media exposure, family supervision, and environmental influences*. These initial codes were subsequently grouped into two broader categories: *internal factors* and *external factors*.

Analysis further indicated that these factors rarely emerged independently. Instead, the findings suggested dynamic interactions between students' individual characteristics and broader social environments, creating varying levels of responsiveness toward value-based educational practices.

Internal Factors

Internal challenges primarily emerged from differences in students' personal awareness, motivation, self-discipline, and readiness to consistently translate learned values into everyday practices. Observation findings demonstrated variations in students' participation patterns

during educational and religious activities. While some students actively engaged in school activities and responded positively to value reinforcement, others demonstrated fluctuating participation and occasionally required repeated guidance.

Teachers described noticeable differences in students' adaptation processes:

"Sometimes in one class we see very different responses. There are students who quickly follow the routines and understand why they are important, but there are also students who need repeated reminders. Even after understanding the material, some still struggle to apply it consistently in daily activities." (G1)

Students similarly acknowledged experiencing difficulties in maintaining consistency beyond structured learning environments:

"Usually during class or religious activities I can follow the rules and practice what teachers explain. But outside class, especially when I am with friends or busy with other things, I sometimes forget or become less consistent." (S4)

The principal further emphasized that students entered the educational environment with different personal backgrounds and levels of readiness:

"Students come with different habits and experiences from home. Some adapt quickly to school routines, while others need more time and guidance before these values become part of their daily behavior." (P1)

Cross-data comparison indicated that internalization was experienced differently across students. The findings suggest that understanding values conceptually did not automatically result in behavioral consistency, as students demonstrated different capacities in translating values into daily practice.

External Factors

External challenges primarily originated from students' broader social environments, including peer relationships, family conditions, and digital media exposure. Observation findings indicated that students continuously interacted with multiple social contexts beyond school settings, occasionally creating competing influences toward values promoted within the educational environment.

Teachers explained that behavioral consistency often shifted according to students' social interactions outside school:

"When students are at school, they usually follow the routines well because there are structured activities and supervision. But outside school, they interact with many different influences that sometimes affect their attitudes and discipline." (G2)

Students also acknowledged the influence of peers and digital environments on their daily behavior:

"Sometimes after spending a lot of time on social media or hanging out with friends, I become less focused on school activities and religious routines because there are many distractions." (S7)

The principal highlighted the importance of continuity between educational and family environments:

"Schools can provide guidance and reinforce values, but family support and students' social environments also determine whether these values continue to be practiced outside school." (P1)

Across multiple data sources, a recurring pattern emerged indicating that the challenges of Islamic values internalization were shaped not only by individual readiness but also by interactions between educational environments and broader social influences. The findings suggest that value internalization should be understood as a multidimensional process requiring continuous reinforcement across school, family, and social contexts.

Theme 3. Students' Character Development Outcomes

The findings revealed that the internalization of Islamic values through Aqidah Akhlak learning contributed to students' character development, particularly in the dimensions of discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. Analysis across observations and interviews suggested that these dimensions did not emerge independently; rather, they developed through interconnected educational experiences and repeated exposure to value-based practices within the madrasah environment. Initial coding generated several recurring indicators including *compliance with school routines*, *completion of obligations*, *participation in religious practices*, *self-awareness*, *behavioral consistency*, and *moral responsibility*. These indicators were subsequently organized into three broader categories: *discipline*, *responsibility*, and *religiosity*.

Discipline

Findings indicated that discipline gradually developed through repeated engagement in structured school routines and religious activities. Observation data demonstrated that students increasingly participated in classroom activities on time, complied with school regulations, and showed greater consistency in following established routines. However, behavioral changes varied across students, suggesting that adaptation processes occurred differently according to individual experiences and readiness.

Teachers observed that discipline tended to develop progressively rather than immediately:

"At the beginning of the semester, there were still students who frequently arrived late or needed repeated reminders before activities started. After several months, we started noticing changes. Some students began preparing themselves without being asked, although a few still needed guidance" (G1)

Students also described experiencing gradual personal changes:

"Previously I often thought that coming late or delaying assignments was not a big problem. But after participating in school routines continuously, I started feeling uncomfortable if I did not follow the rules." (S5)

The principal similarly explained:

"We see discipline as a process rather than a direct outcome. Students gradually become accustomed to routines, and over time these routines begin shaping their behavior." (P1)

Cross-data analysis indicated that discipline was strengthened through repeated educational experiences that transformed external routines into increasingly internalized behavioral practices.

Responsibility

Findings further indicated that responsibility emerged through students' increasing awareness of both personal and collective obligations. Observation findings showed greater student involvement in classroom tasks, group activities, and school responsibilities. However, responsibility was not only reflected in task completion but also in students' awareness of the consequences of their actions toward others.

Teachers described noticeable differences in students' behavioral development:

"Some students initially completed assignments simply because teachers asked them to. Gradually, we noticed that several students started taking initiative by completing tasks without reminders and helping classmates during activities." (G2)

Students similarly explained changes in their understanding of responsibility:

"Now I feel that responsibility is not only about finishing my own work. When we work in groups, I realize that if I do not do my part, it also affects my friends." (S8)

The principal highlighted broader implications of responsibility:

"Responsibility becomes meaningful when students understand that their actions influence not only themselves but also the people around them." (P1)

The findings suggested that responsibility gradually shifted from externally regulated obligations toward more internally driven awareness.

Religiosity

The findings also demonstrated that religiosity developed through continuous participation in religious activities and repeated interaction with value-based educational experiences. Observation findings indicated stronger student participation during collective prayers, Qur'an recitation, and other school religious activities. Nevertheless, the data suggested that students experienced religiosity differently, with some students demonstrating stronger personal engagement than others.

Teachers explained:

"Initially several students joined religious activities because they were compulsory school routines. Over time we observed that many students participated more naturally and showed greater enthusiasm." (G1)

Students similarly described changes in their experiences:

"At first I joined because everyone else participated. But after some time I felt that these activities were not only school routines. I started understanding their meaning and became more comfortable participating." (S10)

The principal further emphasized:

"Religious development is not simply reflected in participation rates but also in how students gradually integrate these values into their daily behavior and interactions." (P1)

Across the data sources, a consistent pattern emerged in which discipline, responsibility, and religiosity developed as interconnected dimensions of students' character formation. Rather than functioning as isolated outcomes, these dimensions appeared to reinforce one another through continuous educational experiences embedded in learning activities, school culture, and social interactions.

Theme 4. Students' Social Development Outcomes

The findings revealed that the internalization of Islamic values through Aqidah Akhlak learning contributed not only to students' individual character formation but also to broader aspects of social development within the madrasah environment. Data analysis indicated that students' social development was reflected through increasing empathy, stronger interpersonal relationships, and improved cooperation during educational and social activities. Initial coding generated several recurring indicators, including helping behavior, social sensitivity, peer interaction, mutual respect, group participation, and collective responsibility. These indicators were subsequently organized into three broader categories: empathy, interpersonal relationships, and cooperation.

Empathy

The findings indicated that students gradually developed stronger awareness and sensitivity toward the needs and experiences of others. Observation findings demonstrated that students increasingly showed supportive behaviors during learning activities, including helping classmates experiencing difficulties, showing concern toward peers, and participating more actively in social and religious activities involving collective participation.

Teachers explained that changes in students' empathy were often observed during daily interactions rather than formal classroom activities:

"We started noticing small changes during classroom activities and outside class. Some students who previously focused only on themselves gradually became more willing to help classmates without being directly instructed." (G1)

Students similarly described changes in their personal experiences:

"Previously I usually focused only on my own activities. But after participating in school activities and learning together with friends, I started realizing that sometimes helping other people is also important." (S6)

The principal emphasized that empathy gradually emerged through repeated social experiences:

"Empathy does not develop instantly. Students learn it through everyday interaction, shared activities, and repeated experiences that encourage them to understand other people's situations." (P1)

Cross-data analysis suggested that empathy developed progressively through repeated opportunities for social interaction and value-based educational experiences.

Interpersonal Relationships

Findings further demonstrated improvements in students' interpersonal relationships within the madrasah environment. Observation findings indicated that students increasingly engaged in positive interactions with peers and teachers and demonstrated stronger social connectedness during educational and extracurricular activities.

Teachers explained that changes were particularly visible in students who initially showed limited social interaction:

"Some students were initially quiet and tended to interact only with certain friends. Gradually, we observed that they became more comfortable communicating and participating with a wider group of classmates." (G2)

Students also acknowledged experiencing changes in their social relationships:

“I feel more comfortable interacting with classmates now. During activities we often talk, help each other, and work together more than before.” (S9)

The principal similarly described changes within the school environment:

“Positive relationships among students become increasingly visible when they participate in school activities together because they gradually learn how to respect and understand one another.” (P1)

The findings indicated that interpersonal relationships developed through repeated interaction patterns that strengthened students’ sense of belonging within the school environment.

Cooperation

The findings also demonstrated that cooperation emerged as an important dimension of students’ social development. Observation findings showed increased student participation during collaborative learning activities, group assignments, and school programs requiring collective involvement.

Teachers explained:

“During group activities we observed that students gradually became more willing to share responsibilities and work together. Previously some students preferred working individually, but over time participation became more balanced.” (G1)

Students similarly described experiencing changes in collaborative experiences:

“When we work in groups now, I feel more comfortable sharing ideas and helping friends because activities become easier when everyone participates.” (S11)

The principal further emphasized:

“Cooperation is important because students learn that achieving goals within educational activities often depends on collective participation rather than individual effort alone.” (P1)

Cross-data comparison suggested that cooperation was not limited to completing educational tasks but reflected broader changes in students’ social participation and collective awareness.

Overall, the findings indicate that empathy, interpersonal relationships, and cooperation developed as interconnected dimensions of students’ social development. These dimensions did not emerge as isolated outcomes but evolved through continuous interaction, shared experiences, and value-based educational practices within the madrasah environment.

Discussion

Theme 1. Islamic Values Internalization as an Educational Mechanism

The findings indicate that the internalization of Islamic values through Aqidah Akhlak learning was not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but developed through the interaction of classroom learning, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school culture. These mechanisms served complementary functions: learning activities introduced the meaning of Islamic values, teachers provided concrete examples of their application, while religious routines and the school environment created repeated opportunities for students to

practice them. Internalization therefore occurred gradually through repeated experiences in which students learned, observed, and practiced values within their everyday school life.

This process can be interpreted through Lickona's dimensions of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*. Aqidah Akhlak learning provides a foundation for understanding moral values, while role modeling and habituation help translate this understanding into behavioral practice [36]. Previous studies have separately emphasized the contribution of teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and Aqidah Akhlak learning to character formation [37]. The present study supports these findings but extends them by showing that these mechanisms operate as an interconnected process rather than as isolated educational practices. This suggests that value internalization becomes more meaningful when moral instruction is consistently reinforced through teachers' behavior, repeated religious practices, and the wider school environment.

Theme 2. Challenges and Variability in the Internalization Process

The findings indicate that the internalization of Islamic values did not occur uniformly across students. Differences in awareness, motivation, previous habits, and readiness influenced how quickly students adapted to value-based practices, with some students demonstrating greater consistency while others continued to require guidance and repeated reminders. This variation suggests that understanding Islamic values does not automatically lead to their consistent application. The contrast between students' behavior within structured school settings and their behavior outside school further illustrates that internalization is a gradual and context-dependent process. Values practiced under teacher supervision may therefore remain partly externally regulated until students develop sufficient personal awareness to sustain them independently.

The process was also shaped by influences beyond the madrasah, particularly peer relationships, family environments, and digital media exposure. These external contexts could either reinforce or compete with the values promoted at school, helping to explain why behavioral consistency varied across students [38]. Previous studies have similarly identified individual readiness and social environments as important influences on value and character development [39], [40]. The present study extends this understanding by showing that the effectiveness of school-based internalization depends partly on the continuity of value reinforcement across different social contexts. Thus, strengthening Islamic values cannot rely solely on classroom instruction and school routines; greater consistency between school experiences, family support, peer interactions, and students' digital environments is also important for sustaining value-based behavior beyond the madrasah.

Theme 3. From External Regulation to Character Development

The findings suggest that discipline, responsibility, and religiosity developed gradually rather than as immediate outcomes of Aqidah Akhlak learning. Repeated participation in school routines and religious activities appeared to move some students from behavior primarily shaped by external expectations toward greater personal awareness and initiative. This transition was evident when students began following routines without repeated reminders, completing responsibilities more independently, and participating in religious activities with a growing understanding of their meaning. Character development in this context can therefore

be understood as a process in which repeated practice gradually transforms externally guided behavior into more personally meaningful and self-directed conduct.

This pattern also suggests that discipline, responsibility, and religiosity should not be viewed as separate outcomes. Regular participation in structured activities encouraged discipline, while fulfilling individual and collective obligations strengthened responsibility; at the same time, religious practices provided a moral context through which these behaviors acquired meaning [41]. Previous studies have linked habituation and Aqidah Akhlak learning with religious character and discipline, and the present findings support this relationship [42], [43]. However, this study further indicates that character formation involves a gradual shift in the basis of students' behavior from compliance with school expectations toward increasing awareness of why particular values should be practiced. Such a shift is important because internalization becomes more evident when students begin to maintain value-based behavior through personal understanding rather than solely through external supervision.

Theme 4. Extending Islamic Values Internalization to Social Development

The findings indicate that the internalization of Islamic values extended beyond individual character formation to students' social development, particularly in empathy, interpersonal relationships, and cooperation. As students repeatedly engaged in value-based learning and collective school activities, moral principles were increasingly expressed through their interactions with others, including greater sensitivity to peers, willingness to help, mutual respect, and participation in shared responsibilities. This suggests that internalization becomes socially meaningful when values are not only understood as personal moral obligations but are also practiced within relationships and collective activities. In this sense, the social environment of the madrasah provides an important space in which individual moral understanding is translated into relational behavior.

Previous studies have largely emphasized religious character, discipline, habituation, and other individual dimensions of character formation [44], [45]. The present study supports this body of research but broadens the discussion by showing that Islamic values internalization also has a relational dimension. Empathy, positive interpersonal relationships, and cooperation indicate that the effects of value-based education may extend from the development of the individual toward the quality of students' interactions with others [46]. This connection between character and social development represents an important contribution of the study, suggesting that Aqidah Akhlak learning can be understood not only as a means of strengthening personal morality and religiosity, but also as part of a broader educational process that supports socially responsible behavior and more constructive relationships within the madrasah community.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Islamic values internalization in Aqidah Akhlak learning is a multidimensional process rather than the result of a single educational practice. Classroom learning provides students with an understanding of values, while teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school culture create opportunities for these values to be observed and practiced. However, the process varies according to students' individual readiness and the social contexts they encounter inside and outside the madrasah. When these educational experiences are reinforced consistently, value internalization appears to move

beyond externally guided behavior toward personal character development and, subsequently, toward empathy, cooperation, and more constructive interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the internalization of Islamic values through Aqidah Akhlak learning is a gradual and multidimensional educational process shaped by the interaction of classroom learning, teacher role modeling, religious habituation, and school culture. Rather than remaining at the level of religious knowledge, internalization was reflected in students' developing discipline, responsibility, and religiosity, as well as in empathy, interpersonal relationships, and cooperation. The process, however, varied among students and was influenced by individual readiness and social contexts beyond the madrasah. These findings highlight that character and social development are interconnected outcomes of value internalization and require consistent reinforcement across students' educational and social experiences. The study therefore contributes to understanding Aqidah Akhlak learning not merely as religious instruction, but as a broader educational process through which Islamic values can become meaningful in students' personal and social lives.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single madrasah, which may limit the transferability of the findings to educational settings with different institutional cultures and student characteristics. Second, the qualitative design emphasized an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions rather than broad generalization. Third, the findings were primarily based on participants' reported experiences and observations conducted within a limited period, which may not fully capture long-term changes in students' behavior and value internalization. In addition, influences beyond the madrasah, including family, peer, and digital environments, were identified but not examined in depth. Future studies could employ longitudinal, comparative, or mixed-method approaches across multiple educational settings to examine how Islamic values internalization develops over time and how different social contexts influence students' character and social development.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

R. conceptualized the study, developed the research design, and led the overall research process, including data collection, statistical analysis, and primary manuscript drafting. F.C. contributed to instrument development, data management, and supported data analysis and interpretation. R provided theoretical and analytical guidance, contributed to the refinement of the conceptual framework, and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The author used OpenAI's ChatGPT to support language refinement and manuscript organization. All content was reviewed and revised by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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