Integrating Qur'anic Thematic Interpretation with Empirical Observation: An Analysis of Students' Islamic Character at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati

Salsabila Mustopa[1*], Tryana Hafilda,[2] Reza Fahlefi,[3] Hafid Muslih,[4] Cecep Anwar,[5] Muhammad Hilmi Ramadhan[6]

[1,2,3,4,5] State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

[6] Al-Azhar University Cairo, Egypt

Article Info

*Corresponding Author:

Name: Salsabila Mustopa
Email:
salsabilamustopa12@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze students' Islamic character from the perspective of thematic interpretation of the Qur'an through direct observation at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati, Subang, Indonesia. The research focused on key character indicators, such as honesty, discipline, respect, and cooperation, which were then linked to the moral values contained in Qur'anic verses related to moral education. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing Miles & Huberman's interactive data model, supported by descriptive quantitative data and thematic interpretation analysis *(al-tafsir al-mawḍū'i)*. The data were analyzed thematically to identify the relationship between student behavior in the school context and the principles of Islamic character education, as interpreted in the Qur'an. The results showed that most students displayed positive behavior in accordance with Islamic teachings, although several challenges remained in the aspects of consistency and internalization of values. However, previous studies tend to separate empirical character assessment from Qur'anic exegesis, leaving a methodological gap in integrating observed behavior with thematic Qur'anic interpretation. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening character education based on Quranic values in the school environment to shape a generation with noble morals that are relevant to their daily social context.

Keywords

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis karakter Islam siswa dari perspektif tafsir tematik Al-Qur'an melalui observasi langsung di SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati, Subang, Indonesia. Penelitian ini berfokus pada indikator-indikator karakter kunci, seperti kejujuran, disiplin, rasa hormat, dan kerja sama, yang kemudian dikaitkan dengan nilai-nilai moral yang terkandung dalam ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an terkait pendidikan akhlak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, memanfaatkan model data interaktif Miles & Huberman, didukung oleh data kuantitatif deskriptif dan analisis tafsir tematik *(al-tafsir al-mawḍū'i)*. Data dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi hubungan antara perilaku siswa dalam konteks sekolah dan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan karakter Islam, sebagaimana ditafsirkan dalam Al-Qur'an. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa menunjukkan perilaku positif sesuai dengan ajaran Islam, meskipun masih terdapat beberapa tantangan dalam aspek konsistensi dan internalisasi nilai. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya penguatan pendidikan karakter berbasis nilai-nilai Al-Qur'an di lingkungan sekolah untuk membentuk generasi yang berakhlak mulia dan relevan dengan konteks sosial kesehariannya.

Kata Kunci: Karakter Islam, Tafsir Tematik Al-Quran, Pendidikan Karakter Siswa.

INTRODUCTION

Education serves both to transmit knowledge and to shape students' character. It is recognized as a global common good that promotes dignity, social responsibility, and sustainability, rather than focusing solely on cognitive development (UNESCO, 2015). Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the primary aim of education is to cultivate proper conduct through knowledge-based self-discipline, thereby fostering moral action (Al-Attas, 1995). Effective character education must address the dimensions of cognition, emotion, and behavior, highlighting the importance of schools as intentionally developed moral communities (Berkowitz, 2021). Thus, education is fundamentally the integration of knowledge and morality, guiding students to become both knowledgeable and ethical individuals.

The interplay between education and morality has become increasingly prominent in the context of globalization, digital transformation, and social change, all of which generate value tensions among adolescents. Recent meta-analytic research demonstrates that character education programs have a significant impact on various student outcomes, reinforcing the effectiveness of well-designed interventions in shaping behavior (Brown et al., 2022). Cross-cultural studies further reveal that both cultural context and developmental stage influence the ethical orientations of young people, underscoring the need for schools to align character education policies with local social realities (McKenzie & Jensen, 2024). The UNESCO Framework advocates for the enhancement of cultural and ethical literacy as a foundational element of 21st-century education (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, character education should be regarded as an essential strategy for cultivating a generation that is both morally resilient and adaptable to the challenges of the contemporary world.

In Qur'anic studies, the thematic interpretation approach *(al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī)* provides a structured method for compiling and analyzing verses by theme, thereby addressing contemporary educational challenges (El-Mesawi, 2005). This method is presented in the works of Muhammad al-Ghazali (Al-Ghazali, 2000). It has been further developed in modern interpretations, such as M. Quraish Shihab's Al-Misbah and Wahbah al-Zuhayli's Al-Munir. Both have been widely studied in moral education research (Az-Zuhaili, 2013; Shihab, 2002). These works offer a comprehensive overview of Qur'anic values that are relevant to student character development.

The analysis systematically aligns these behaviors with Islamic character principles derived from Qur'anic verses, including honesty, discipline, respect for teachers and parents, responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge. Empirical research consistently identifies these character values, as demonstrated by thematic studies of Surah Al-Isra' (23–38) and comparative analyses of Al-Misbah and Al-Wasith regarding educational values (Andhim et al., 2024). Character development is conceptualized as a sequential process encompassing the recognition of values (cognitive), appreciation of values (affective), and practical application (Rohman, 2019). To assess student character, this study applies a framework that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, facilitating the evaluation of the alignment between observed behaviors and the development of Qur'anic values within the school culture.

Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic character education and thematic Qur'anic interpretation, existing studies tend to address these domains separately. Most previous research

emphasizes either the normative extraction of moral values from Qur'anic texts or the empirical measurement of students' character without systematically linking observed behavior to Qur'anic exegesis. This separation indicates a methodological gap in integrating empirical observation with *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* as an analytical framework for character education. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) how Islamic character values are manifested in students' daily behavior at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati; (2) how these observed behaviors align with Islamic character principles derived from thematic Qur'anic interpretation; and (3) how the integration of empirical observation and Qur'anic exegesis can strengthen the conceptual model of Islamic character education. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of an integrative framework that connects cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of character education with thematic Qur'anic interpretation. Practically, it provides contextual and evidence-based insights for educators and policymakers to design and implement Qur'an-based character education strategies that are relevant, applicable, and responsive to contemporary school realities.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-method design, in which qualitative inquiry serves as the primary analytical orientation, supported by descriptive quantitative data. The qualitative strand was conducted through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and thematic Qur'anic interpretation (*al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*), while questionnaire data functioned complementarily to describe behavioral tendencies and strengthen methodological triangulation. This design is particularly suited to research requiring both contextual depth and numerical reinforcement, as the integration of both strands enhances the credibility and comprehensiveness of the findings (Creswell, 2018). The study was carried out at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati, Subang, Indonesia, involving 90 students selected proportionally from grades VII, VIII, and IX (30 students per grade) to ensure balanced developmental representation. Teacher participants were drawn through purposive sampling, comprising three homeroom teachers, three Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, and one Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher, selected based on their direct roles in character education.

Data were gathered through three complementary instruments: semi-structured interviews, Likert-scale questionnaires, and participatory classroom observation. Interviews were conducted with all teacher participants to explore their evaluations and perceptions of students' Islamic character in daily school life (Patton, 2014). Questionnaires were administered to all 90 students to obtain descriptive quantitative data on six key character indicators: honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect for teachers, cooperation, and enthusiasm for learning (Cohen et al., 2002). Classroom observations were carried out across four learning sessions in grades VII, VIII, and IX to document actual student behavior in authentic educational settings (Spradley, 1980).

Data analysis followed the Miles et al (2014) interactive model through four sequential stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During reduction, interview transcripts, observation notes, and questionnaire results were systematically coded according to predefined Islamic character indicators. Findings were then presented through descriptive narratives and visual representations, before being verified through triangulation across all data sources.
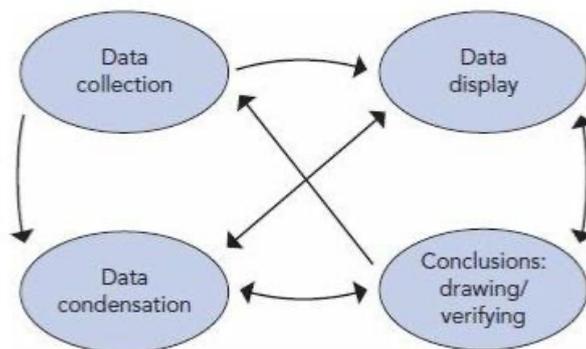
Figure 1. Qualitative Data Analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

The analytical process was further deepened through the application of *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* as a normative-analytical lens. Relevant Qur'anic verses were identified thematically, classified according to cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of character, and interpreted through an integrative reading of both classical and contemporary *tafsir*, particularly *Tafsir al-Misbah* (Shihab, 2002) and *Tafsir al-Munir* (Az-Zuhaili, 2013). This framework enabled systematic alignment between empirical behavioral findings and Qur'anic ethical principles, ensuring both textual fidelity and contextual relevance to the school environment studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Classroom Observation of Students' Islamic Character Indicators

Observational data collected at SMPN 1 Kalijati systematically examined five core indicators of Islamic character among students: honesty, discipline, respect for teachers, cooperation, and enthusiasm for learning. The observational instrument was administered across multiple classroom sessions involving students from grades VII, VIII, and IX to ensure representativeness of behavioral patterns across developmental stages. The results are presented in Figure 2 below.
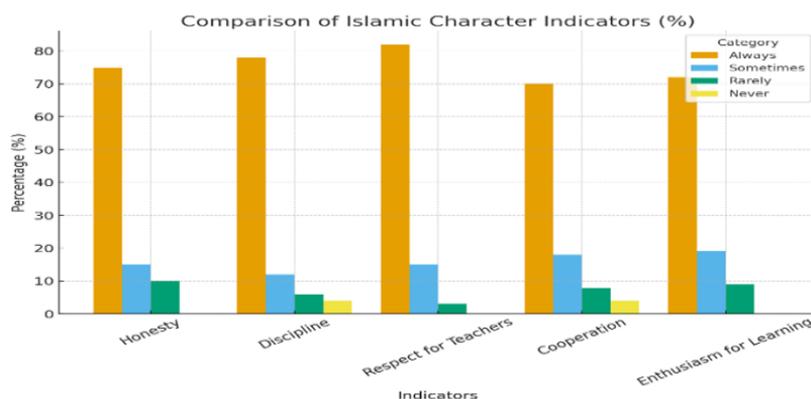

Figure 2. Islamic character indicators (observation)

The observational findings reveal that students at SMPN 1 Kalijati generally exhibit well-established Islamic character tendencies, as demonstrated by the predominance of responses in the 'Always' category across all five indicators. Among the indicators measured, respect for teachers (*ta'ẓīm al-mu'allim*) emerged as the most consistently demonstrated value, with 82.2% of students displaying polite and deferential conduct toward educators on a regular basis. Only 2.2%

of students were observed to rarely exhibit respectful behavior, and none fell into the 'Never' category, reflecting a deeply embedded culture of courtesy and *adab* within the school environment. This finding resonates with Berkowitz (2021), who argues that school culture and the quality of teacher-student relational norms are among the most decisive factors shaping moral value expression in educational settings. When institutional culture consistently models and reinforces respectful conduct, students are more likely to internalize such behavior as a normative expectation rather than an externally imposed obligation.

Discipline ranked second at 77.8% in the 'Always' category; however, 4.4% of students were recorded as never demonstrating disciplined behavior. This finding points to a need for targeted interventions addressing time management and behavioral self-regulation. Prior research confirms that discipline as a moral value requires not only external enforcement but also the development of internal self-governance rooted in moral awareness (Brown et al., 2022). The presence of students who consistently lack discipline suggests that compliance-based school routines may be insufficient in fostering consistency *(istiqāmah)* as an internalized Islamic value, and that deeper habituative approaches are necessary to bridge the gap between rule-following and genuine moral commitment.

Honesty *(ṣidq)* was demonstrated consistently by 75.6% of students; nonetheless, the aggregated 'Sometimes' (15.6%) and 'Rarely' (8.9%) responses collectively represent nearly one quarter of the total sample. This proportion indicates that situational pressures, particularly those associated with academic assessment and assignment deadlines, may undermine students' sustained commitment to honest conduct. McKenzie & Jensen (2024) similarly note that adolescents' ethical behavior is highly context-sensitive and susceptible to environmental pressures, underscoring the importance of cultivating moral resilience through structured character education programs that go beyond normative instruction.

Cooperation *(ta'āwun)* presented the most significant challenge among all indicators, with only 70.0% of students consistently contributing actively to group tasks. The remaining 30% were distributed across 'Sometimes' (17.8%), 'Rarely' (7.8%), and 'Never' (4.4%) categories. This pattern suggests the presence of structural barriers to collaborative engagement, including ambiguity in role distribution, the free-riding phenomenon, and insufficient accountability mechanisms within group learning structures. Enthusiasm for learning, while registering a relatively high 'Always' rate of 72.2%, demonstrated the greatest variability in the 'Sometimes' category (18.9%), indicating that learning motivation among students is subject to fluctuation depending on pedagogical relevance, workload demands, and individual psychological states. Notably, for honesty, respect, and enthusiasm for learning, no students fell into the 'Never' category, suggesting that foundational moral values are already present; the central challenge lies in elevating behavioral consistency toward the 'Always' standard.

Students' Islamic Character Based on Questionnaire Findings

To complement and validate the observational data, questionnaires employing a Likert-scale format were administered to all 90 student participants. The instrument measured the same five Islamic character indicators assessed through direct observation, enabling cross-method triangulation of behavioral tendencies. The results are presented in Figure 3 below.
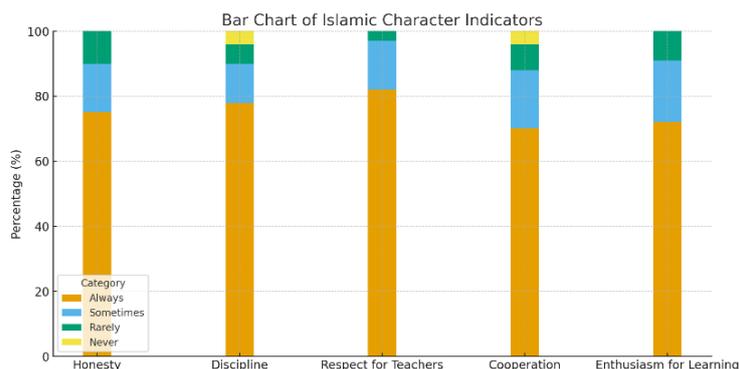
Figure 3: Islamic character indicator (questionnaires)

The questionnaire data largely corroborate the observational findings, affirming that students' Islamic character is generally positive, though notable inconsistencies persist across specific dimensions. Regarding honesty, 75.6% of students reported consistently completing academic tasks without engaging in dishonest conduct. However, 24.5% acknowledged practicing honesty only occasionally or rarely, highlighting a persistent challenge in academic integrity. This finding aligns with Brown et al. (2022), who demonstrate through meta-analytic evidence that students' honesty in academic contexts is frequently shaped by perceived consequences and peer norms rather than internalized ethical principles, suggesting that honesty education must move beyond normative instruction toward the cultivation of intrinsic moral motivation. Furthermore, McKenzie & Jensen (2024) note that cultural and developmental contexts significantly mediate adolescents' ethical orientations, implying that locally relevant habituation strategies are essential for strengthening honest conduct in school environments.

In the domain of discipline, 77.8% of students reported consistently submitting assignments within stipulated deadlines. Nevertheless, 4.4% indicated a persistent lack of discipline, signaling the need for more structured behavioral support mechanisms. Rohman (2019) emphasizes that discipline in the Islamic educational context must be understood as a form of *amānah* (moral responsibility), requiring its cultivation through habituative and reflective practices rather than punitive measures alone. The gap between students who demonstrate consistent discipline and those who do not may therefore reflect differences in the degree to which discipline has been meaningfully internalized as a moral commitment, rather than merely practiced as institutional compliance. Brown et al (2022) similarly confirm that character education programs produce more durable behavioral outcomes when they explicitly cultivate internal moral motivation rather than relying on external behavioral management systems.

The respect for teachers indicator yielded the most favorable results across both data collection methods, with 82.2% of students consistently demonstrating polite and respectful conduct, including courteous greetings and physical gestures such as handshaking. This finding suggests that respect for authority has been successfully normalized within the school's institutional culture, constituting one of the most robustly internalized Islamic values among the student population (Chadija et al., 2026). Classical Islamic educational thought, as articulated by Al–Attas (1995), regards *ta'ẓīm al-mu'allim* as a prerequisite for the acquisition of beneficial knowledge, suggesting that this strong foundation in respectful conduct creates favorable conditions for deeper moral and intellectual development. Ikhwanuddin et al., (2025) further

affirms that schools functioning as intentional moral communities where respectful relational norms are consistently modeled and reinforcedtend to produce stronger overall character outcomes across multiple dimensions.

Cooperation remained the weakest indicator in the questionnaire data, with only 70% of students reporting consistent active participation in group learning activities. The remaining 30% acknowledged contributing to group work only sometimes, rarely, or never. This result carries significant implications, given that *ta'āwun* (cooperative mutual assistance) is not merely a social skill but a morally grounded Qur'anic obligation. Berkowitz (2021) identifies collaborative learning as a key structural mechanism for developing prosocial values and collective responsibility within school environments. The relatively low rate of consistent cooperation among students suggests that current instructional approaches may not sufficiently structure collaborative interdependence or establish clear individual accountability within group tasks, a finding consistent with Brown et al (2022) observation that cooperative character outcomes require intentional pedagogical design rather than incidental social interaction.

Enthusiasm for learning was demonstrated consistently by 72.2% of students, while 27.8% expressed engagement only occasionally or rarely. This variability is significant because enthusiasm for learning, when viewed through a Qur'anic lens, is inseparable from sincerity *(ikhlāṣ)* and the intrinsic pursuit of knowledge as a form of worship. McKenzie & Jensen (2024) note that adolescents' learning motivation is significantly influenced by the degree to which educational content is perceived as culturally and personally meaningful, suggesting that integrating Qur'anic motivational frameworks into learning design may help sustain and deepen students' enthusiasm beyond surface-level cognitive engagement. Rohman (2019) similarly argues that enthusiasm for learning in Islamic education must be cultivated as an expression of *thalabul 'ilm* (the sincere pursuit of knowledge), grounded in moral and spiritual awareness rather than performance-oriented incentives alone.

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Respectful Behavior in School Culture

To obtain a comprehensive multi-perspective understanding of students' Islamic character as it manifests in daily school life, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven teacher participants: three homeroom teachers, three Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, and one Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher. The interview data were analyzed thematically and integrated into the following narrative discussion, providing qualitative depth to the quantitative patterns identified in the observational and questionnaire findings. Across all interviews, a consistent pattern emerged: students generally demonstrate a solid foundational understanding of Islamic moral values and express these values positively in their social behavior. However, the transition from moral awareness to consistent behavioral practice remains incomplete, particularly in academic discipline, cooperative participation, and daily religious habituation. This pattern converges with the observational and questionnaire findings, thereby strengthening the triangulated validity of the study's overall conclusions.

Observational data confirm that respectful and polite conduct is among the most consistently demonstrated values at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati, with 82.2% of students regularly exhibiting courteous behavior toward teachers. Students were observed routinely greeting educators, communicating using appropriate language registers, and maintaining harmonious

interpersonal relationships with peers. This finding is consistent with Berkowitz (2021) argument that school culture plays a decisive role in shaping students' moral conduct, particularly when respectful behavior is consistently modeled and institutionally reinforced. This behavioral reality is further strengthened by interview findings with homeroom teachers, who confirmed that:

> *"Most of our students already understand how to behave respectfully they greet us every morning, they use polite language, and they generally treat teachers well in social situations. This has become a natural habit for them in school."*

However, the data also reveal a notable discrepancy between students' positive social conduct and their academic discipline. Despite demonstrating polite behavior in interpersonal contexts, many students struggled with meeting assignment deadlines, following classroom procedures consistently, and sustaining academic responsibility over time. This gap between social morality and academic responsibility reflects what Rohman (2019) identifies as the challenge of translating moral cognition into habitual academic conduct a transition requiring sustained pedagogical reinforcement rather than incidental instruction alone. Brown et al. (2022) similarly confirm that durable disciplinary behavior emerges only when internal moral motivation is explicitly cultivated alongside external regulatory structures. This condition is further affirmed through interview data with homeroom teachers, who observed that:

> *"In social interaction, students are generally well-behaved, but when it comes to submitting work on time or following through on academic commitments, many of them are inconsistent they know what is expected, but they don't always follow through."*

A related pattern emerges in the domain of religious practice. Questionnaire data indicate that 72.2% of students consistently demonstrate enthusiasm for learning, yet interview findings suggest that this enthusiasm does not uniformly translate into independent religious engagement outside structured lesson time. PAI teachers reported that students actively participate in classroom discussions and express genuine interest in Qur'anic teachings during lessons (Aimah, 2023). Nevertheless, voluntary religious practices such as *shalat Dhuha* and independent Qur'an recitation remain limited among the majority of students. This discrepancy reflects the fundamental challenge in Islamic character education of bridging the gap between *'ilm* (knowledge) and *'amal* (practice), wherein moral understanding does not automatically generate sustained moral action (Al–Attas, 1995). Andhim et al. (2024) similarly found that moral values emphasized in Islamic education tend to remain at the level of cognitive awareness when habituative reinforcement mechanisms are absent. This gap is further evidenced through interview data with PAI teachers, who noted that:

> *"Students are enthusiastic in class they ask questions, they engage with the material but when it comes to performing the Dhuha prayer voluntarily or reading the Qur'an on their own, only a small number do it regularly without being reminded."*

The BK teacher's perspective complemented these findings by identifying the most prevalent behavioral challenges in counseling contexts, including tardiness, passive participation in group activities, and fluctuating learning motivation patterns entirely consistent with the quantitative data. These behavioral issues, while recurring, were generally manageable and did not reflect serious disciplinary problems. Crucially, the data indicate that students responded

significantly more positively to reflective and dialogical guidance than to punitive disciplinary measures, a finding that aligns with Berkowitz (2021) contention that humanistic character guidance grounded in value-based reflection produces more sustained moral development among adolescent learners. This pattern is further confirmed through interview data with the BK teacher, who explained that:

> *"When I sit with students and ask them to reflect on why they behaved a certain way, and connect that to their values and responsibilities, they usually respond well they become more aware and more motivated to change. Punishment alone rarely produces lasting improvement."*

Taken together, the interview data from homeroom teachers, PAI teachers, and the BK teacher reveal a coherent and convergent pattern: students at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati possess a solid cognitive and affective foundation of Islamic values, as evidenced by their respectful social conduct, active classroom engagement, and general positive orientation toward Islamic teachings. However, significant gaps remain in the consistent behavioral application of these values, particularly in academic discipline, cooperative participation, and independent religious practice. This convergent pattern strengthens the empirical basis of the study and underscores the need for integrative character education strategies that emphasize habituation, sustained role modeling, and dialogical guidance as structural complements to moral instruction (Berkowitz, 2021; Rohman, 2019).

Islamic Character through Thematic Qur'anic Interpretation

The behavioral patterns identified through observational data, questionnaires, and teacher interviews can be more deeply understood through the analytical lens of *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* (thematic Qur'anic interpretation). This section examines each of the five core character indicators in relation to their Qur'anic foundations, identifying the gap between observed student behavior and the normative Qur'anic ideal, as well as the structural factors that inhibit full internalization.

First, honesty *(ṣidq)* is unequivocally established as a foundational Islamic moral value in QS. At-Taubah (9):119, which commands believers to align themselves with the truthful. As interpreted in Tafsir al-Misbah, this verse implies not merely individual truthfulness but the cultivation of a communal culture of integrity within every social institution, including schools (Shihab, 2002). The empirical findings reveal that while the majority of students exhibit honest behavior in interpersonal contexts, academic honesty remains situationally inconsistent, particularly under the pressure of assessments and deadlines. This indicates that *ṣidq* has not yet been stabilized as a *malakah* (moral disposition) but remains contingent on external circumstances. Andhim et al. (2024) similarly found in their thematic analysis of Surah Al-Isra' (23–38) that moral values taught in Islamic education frequently remain at the level of cognitive awareness rather than dispositional character, reflecting the same knowledge-practice gap identified in the present study.

Second, discipline is grounded in the Qur'anic principle of *istiqāmah* (steadfastness and consistency), as articulated in QS. As-Saff (61):4, which praises those who act in orderly and unified commitment. Tafsir al-Munir interprets this verse as emphasizing the moral imperative of consistency between intention and action across all spheres of life, including educational responsibility (Az-Zuhaili, 2013). The present findings indicate that students' discipline remains largely externally regulated, driven by institutional rules and teacher supervision rather than by

internalized moral conviction (Karim et al., 2023). This structural reality suggests that school culture prioritizes compliance over reflective moral formation, thereby limiting the development of self-directed *amānah* as an intrinsic motivator of disciplined conduct. Brown et al. (2022) confirm that character education programs produce more durable behavioral outcomes when they explicitly cultivate internal moral motivation rather than relying on external behavioral management systems, reinforcing the need for structural reform in how discipline is approached within Islamic school environments.

Third, respect for teachers *(ta'ẓīm al-mu'allim)* represents the most robustly demonstrated Islamic character value in this study, consistent with the Qur'anic elevation of knowledge and its bearers in QS. Al-Isra' (17):23–24 and QS. Al-Mujadilah (58):11. The former emphasizes reverence for authority as an extension of moral devotion, while the latter affirms the elevated status of those possessing knowledge. Al–Attas (1995) argues that genuine respect for teachers in the Islamic tradition extends beyond social courtesy to encompass obedience, intellectual seriousness, and active engagement with transmitted knowledge. Although students demonstrate strong surface-level respect, the Qur'anic ideal demands that this reverence be expressed through sustained academic responsibility and sincere engagement with learning dimensions that remain inconsistently realized. Berkowitz (2021) similarly notes that respect, to function as a genuine character value, must be expressed not only in social conduct but also in the seriousness and responsibility with which students approach their educational duties.

Fourth, cooperation *(ta'āwun)* is explicitly mandated in QS. Al-Hujurat (49):10, which establishes believers as a unified brotherhood obligated to support one another toward collective good. As interpreted through *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*, this verse frames cooperation not as a situational social behavior but as a morally binding expression of Islamic fraternity and collective responsibility. The empirical data reveal that a significant minority of students remain passive or minimally engaged in collaborative tasks, suggesting the presence of structural constraints that inhibit the full enactment of *ta'āwun*. These constraints include competitive academic culture, unclear role distribution within group tasks, and insufficient pedagogical scaffolding for collaborative interdependence. Berkowitz (2021) notes that prosocial values such as cooperation require deliberate structural embedding within school culture, while Andhim et al. (2024) affirm that Qur'anic values related to social cooperation must be operationalized through concrete educational practices to transition from normative understanding to consistent behavioral expression.

Fifth, enthusiasm for learning finds its most profound Qur'anic foundation in QS. Al-'Alaq (96):1–5, the first revealed verses of the Qur'an, which establish the pursuit of knowledge through reading and reflection as the foundational act of human engagement with the divine. This passage frames learning not as a cognitive exercise alone but as an act of spiritual responsibility and worship. The findings indicate that while students demonstrate strong enthusiasm in structured classroom settings, this motivation has not consistently translated into self-directed learning habits or voluntary religious engagement. Tafsir al-Misbah interprets the imperative to read and seek knowledge as encompassing both formal and informal dimensions of intellectual and spiritual development (Shihab, 2002). The structural tendency of the curriculum to orient students toward

assessment performance rather than intrinsic knowledge-seeking may therefore constitute a significant impediment to the holistic realization of 'ilm as an Islamic value, a concern echoed by McKenzie & Jensen (2024) in their cross-cultural analysis of adolescent moral development.

Overall, the five core values honesty, discipline, respect for teachers, cooperation, and enthusiasm for learning represent essential components of Islamic character as rooted in the Qur'an. However, the findings indicate that students' character development has not yet reached the Qur'anic ideal of integrated moral consciousness and consistent practice. Structural factors, including instructional emphasis on cognitive achievement, externally driven discipline, and limited habituation of religious practices, appear to hinder the full internalization of Islamic values (Sahidin et al., 2025). Therefore, Qur'an-based character education requires not only moral instruction but also structural support through school culture, role modeling, reflective practices, and sustained habituation to enable values to move from awareness to lived reality.

Integration with Islamic Character Education Theory

The findings of this study reflect a pattern well-documented in character education literature: the cognitive and affective dimensions of moral development tend to precede and outpace the behavioral dimension, creating a persistent gap between knowing and doing. Students at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati demonstrate strong moral awareness and positive emotional orientation toward Islamic values, yet struggle to apply these values consistently in daily academic and religious practice. This pattern is consistent with the sequential character development framework described by Rohman (2019), which identifies value recognition, value appreciation, and value actualization as interrelated but distinct developmental stages that require targeted pedagogical support at each level. Berkowitz (2021) similarly affirms that sustainable character formation demands intentional educational design that simultaneously addresses all three dimensions rather than privileging cognitive transmission alone.

Rather than treating Western and Islamic theories of character education as parallel but separate frameworks, this study proposes a synthetic integrative model drawing on the complementary strengths of both traditions. Contemporary character education theory emphasizes the interdependence of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, arguing that durable moral development requires simultaneous engagement across all three domains (Berkowitz, 2021; Brown et al., 2022). Islamic educational philosophy similarly insists on the coherence of *'ilm* (knowledge), *irādah* (moral intention), and *'amal* (action), recognizing that *akhlaq* (character) is not a product of knowledge alone but of sustained *tahdzīb al-akhlaq* (moral refinement) that transforms values into stable dispositional habits (Al–Attas, 1995). This convergence between Western empirical frameworks and Islamic normative theory provides a robust foundation for an integrative model of Islamic character education that is both methodologically coherent and contextually relevant.

This synthesis illuminates the central structural challenge identified in this study: character formation is impeded when the educational environment prioritizes cognitive transmission over habituative reinforcement, external compliance over internal moral development, and assessment performance over intrinsic value-seeking. Under such structural conditions, Islamic values are practiced selectively and situationally rather than as stable expressions of internalized character (Nurchayani et al., 2023). The Qur'anic principles articulated in Surah Al-Isra' (23–38) encompassing honesty, responsibility, humility, and relational respect provide a comprehensive

normative foundation for an integrative character education model that simultaneously addresses moral cognition, affective commitment, and behavioral habituation (Andhim et al., 2024). El-Mesawi (2005) further affirms that *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* as an analytical method is particularly well-suited to addressing contemporary educational challenges precisely because it enables the systematic derivation of actionable moral principles from Qur'anic themes, thereby bridging normative Islamic ethics and empirical educational practice.

An effective integrative framework for Islamic character education therefore requires not only moral instruction but also structural mechanisms that embed Qur'anic values within the daily fabric of school life. These mechanisms include consistent teacher role modeling, the cultivation of Islamic behavioral routines and practices, reflective dialogue between students and educators, and collaborative accountability structures that reinforce value-based conduct across all educational interactions (Susanto et al., 2023). In this framework, Islamic character education is conceived as a dynamic, continuous, and structurally embedded process, in which Qur'anic values are not merely transmitted as knowledge but lived as habitual practice progressively deepening through sustained educational engagement and guided moral formation (Hadi & Prayogi, 2025; Koesoemawati et al., 2026). The integration of empirical findings with *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* as an analytical framework thus offers a methodologically grounded and contextually responsive model for strengthening Islamic character education in contemporary school settings, contributing both theoretical coherence and practical applicability to the broader field of Islamic moral pedagogy (Wanto & Jalwis, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic character development among students at SMP Negeri 1 Kalijati has progressed substantially at the cognitive and affective levels, particularly in respect for teachers, honesty, and enthusiasm for learning. However, a persistent gap between moral awareness and consistent behavioral practice remains, especially in discipline, cooperative participation, and independent religious habituation. This finding contributes an integrative methodological framework that systematically connects empirical observation with *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī* as an analytical lens a contribution that distinguishes this study from prior research which tends to address Islamic character assessment and Qur'anic exegesis separately.

The study further confirms that structural factors, including externally driven discipline, assessment-oriented curriculum, and limited habituation mechanisms, constitute the primary barriers to full value internalization. This study is limited to a single school context with a cross-sectional design, restricting broader generalization and longitudinal observation. Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative and longitudinal studies examining the effectiveness of cooperative learning, learning contracts, and *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*-based habituation programs across diverse school settings. Practically, schools are encouraged to implement structured collaborative learning, value-reflective counseling, and coordinated character education ecosystems involving homeroom teachers, *PAI* teachers, and guidance counselors to strengthen the behavioral dimension of Islamic character formation.

DECLARATION OF USING AI

The authors used ChatGPT to improve language and readability. The authors reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content.

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