



Character Establishment through Islamic Religious Education: A Holistic Educational Approach

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Abstract

Character establishment has become a central concern in contemporary education, particularly in response to moral degradation, social fragmentation, and the challenges posed by rapid technological change. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds a strategic position in addressing these issues by integrating spiritual, moral, intellectual, and social dimensions of human development. This study explores character establishment through Islamic Religious Education using a holistic educational approach that goes beyond cognitive achievement and emphasizes the internalization of values and ethical practice in everyday life. Employing a qualitative literature-based method, this research analyzes classical Islamic educational thought, contemporary pedagogical frameworks, and recent empirical studies on character education. The findings reveal that effective character establishment in IRE is achieved through the integration of faith (*iman*), knowledge (*'ilm*), moral conduct (*akhlaq*), and action (*'amal*), supported by exemplary educators, reflective learning, and value-based school culture. Furthermore, a holistic approach enables IRE to respond adaptively to modern educational challenges by fostering critical thinking, moral resilience, and social responsibility without detaching learners from Islamic values. This study concludes that Islamic Religious Education, when implemented holistically, serves not only as a medium for religious instruction but also as a transformative force in shaping ethical, responsible, and spiritually grounded individuals capable of contributing positively to society.

Kata Kunci : Character establishment; Islamic Religious Education; holistic education; moral development; values-based learning.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, education has faced growing pressure not only to produce academically competent individuals but also to cultivate strong character, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. The rapid advancement of technology, globalization, and digital culture has significantly transformed human interaction, learning patterns, and value systems. While these developments offer unprecedented opportunities for innovation and access to knowledge, they also contribute to moral challenges such as individualism, declining empathy, ethical relativism, and the weakening of spiritual consciousness. Consequently, character establishment has emerged as a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in societies experiencing social fragmentation and moral uncertainty.

Character education is no longer viewed as a supplementary component of schooling but as a foundational objective that shapes the moral direction of individuals and communities. Various educational systems around the world acknowledge that cognitive excellence alone is insufficient to address complex social problems without being accompanied by moral integrity, emotional intelligence, and ethical commitment. In this context, religious education—especially Islamic Religious Education (IRE)—holds a strategic role, as it is inherently oriented toward the formation of values, moral discipline, and spiritual awareness alongside intellectual development.

Islamic Religious Education is not merely concerned with transmitting religious knowledge or ritual practices.

Rather, its core mission lies in nurturing holistic human beings (*insān kāmil*) who embody faith (*iman*), knowledge (*‘ilm*), moral conduct (*akhlaq*), and righteous action (*‘amal*). Classical Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes the inseparability of knowledge and character, asserting that education without moral grounding may lead to intellectual arrogance, social injustice, and spiritual emptiness. Scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Ibn Khaldun consistently highlighted that the ultimate aim of education is the refinement of character and the cultivation of ethical individuals who contribute positively to society.

However, in many contemporary educational settings, including Islamic institutions, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education often remains fragmented and overly cognitive. Instruction frequently prioritizes memorization, doctrinal understanding, and examination performance, while the deeper internalization of values and transformation of behavior receive less attention. This gap between knowledge and practice has raised concerns about the effectiveness of IRE in responding to modern moral challenges. Students may demonstrate familiarity with religious concepts but struggle to reflect Islamic values in their daily conduct, social interactions, and decision-making processes.

The challenges facing Islamic Religious Education are further intensified by the digital era. The pervasive influence of social media, artificial intelligence, and instant information has reshaped students' perceptions of authority, truth, and morality. Young learners are increasingly exposed to diverse value systems, ideologies, and lifestyles that

may conflict with Islamic ethical principles. Without a holistic educational framework, Islamic Religious Education risks becoming disconnected from students' lived realities, limiting its transformative potential in shaping character and moral resilience, (Wahyudi & Syafi'i, 2025).

In response to these challenges, a holistic educational approach has gained prominence in educational theory and practice. Holistic education emphasizes the integration of intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual dimensions of learning. It views learners as whole persons rather than passive recipients of information, recognizing that character formation occurs through meaningful experiences, reflective engagement, role modeling, and a supportive educational environment. When applied to Islamic Religious Education, a holistic approach enables the alignment of religious knowledge with lived values, ethical practice, and social responsibility (Baihaqi et al., 2023).

A holistic approach to Islamic Religious Education seeks to move beyond the dichotomy between religious instruction and character education. Instead, it positions character establishment as the essence of Islamic learning itself. Faith is not only taught as a theological concept but internalized through reflective practice; moral values are not merely discussed but embodied through example and habituation; and social responsibility is cultivated through community engagement and ethical action. Educators play a crucial role in this process, as their attitudes, behaviors, and pedagogical choices significantly influence students' moral development.

Moreover, holistic Islamic Religious Education recognizes the importance of

educational ecosystems, including curriculum design, teaching methods, school culture, and family involvement. Character establishment cannot be achieved through isolated lessons or moral exhortation alone; it requires consistent reinforcement across learning environments. Schools that cultivate value-based cultures—where respect, honesty, discipline, and compassion are practiced collectively—create conditions that support the internalization of Islamic character values.

Despite the growing recognition of holistic education, scholarly discussions on character establishment through Islamic Religious Education remain fragmented. Many studies focus either on theoretical aspects of Islamic ethics or on isolated pedagogical strategies without integrating classical Islamic thought, contemporary educational frameworks, and empirical insights. This fragmentation limits the development of comprehensive models that can guide effective practice in diverse educational contexts. Therefore, there is a need for studies that synthesize these perspectives to offer a coherent understanding of how Islamic Religious Education can function as a transformative force in character establishment.

This study addresses this gap by exploring character establishment through Islamic Religious Education using a holistic educational approach. By drawing on classical Islamic educational philosophy, contemporary pedagogical theories, and recent empirical studies on character education, this research seeks to articulate a conceptual framework that integrates faith, knowledge, moral conduct, and action. Rather than proposing a rigid instructional model, the study emphasizes principles and

strategies that can be adapted to various educational settings while remaining rooted in Islamic values, (Altinyelken, 2021).

The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on Islamic education by reaffirming character establishment as the core objective of learning and situating it within a holistic educational paradigm. Practically, it offers insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen the role of Islamic Religious Education in addressing contemporary moral challenges. By emphasizing internalization, reflection, and lived values, this study highlights how Islamic Religious Education can remain relevant and impactful in an era marked by rapid change and moral complexity, (Rahmawati, 2018).

Ultimately, this study argues that Islamic Religious Education, when implemented holistically, transcends its function as a subject within the curriculum. It becomes a transformative process that shapes ethical, responsible, and spiritually grounded individuals capable of navigating modern life with moral clarity and social commitment. In doing so, Islamic Religious Education contributes not only to individual character development but also to the cultivation of a more just, compassionate, and value-oriented society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a literature-based analytical approach to explore character establishment through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) from a holistic

educational perspective. A qualitative methodology is considered appropriate because the study seeks to understand concepts, values, meanings, and educational principles rather than to measure variables statistically. By focusing on interpretation and synthesis, this approach allows for a deeper examination of how Islamic Religious Education contributes to character formation in contemporary educational contexts.

Research Design

The research is structured as a qualitative literature study (*library research*) combined with conceptual analysis. This design enables the integration of classical Islamic educational thought, contemporary educational theories, and recent empirical findings related to character education and holistic learning. Rather than treating these sources as isolated bodies of knowledge, the study adopts an integrative perspective to construct a coherent conceptual framework for character establishment within Islamic Religious Education.

The study does not aim to generalize findings statistically but to provide analytical depth and theoretical insight that can inform educational practice, curriculum development, and future empirical research. Through systematic examination of relevant literature, the research identifies key principles, patterns, and strategies that underpin effective character establishment in Islamic educational settings.

Data Sources

Data for this study are derived from secondary sources, including academic journal articles, scholarly books, policy documents, and authoritative reports

related to Islamic education, character education, and holistic pedagogy. The literature includes both classical Islamic sources—such as works by Al-Ghazali, Ibn Miskawayh, and Ibn Khaldun—and contemporary studies published in reputable national and international journals.

Priority is given to peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in recognized databases, as well as seminal texts in Islamic educational philosophy. Policy documents and curriculum guidelines related to religious and character education are also included to provide contextual relevance and practical insights. This diverse range of sources ensures a balanced representation of normative, theoretical, and applied perspectives.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process is conducted through systematic literature searching and selection. Relevant publications are identified using academic databases and digital libraries by employing key terms such as *Islamic Religious Education*, *character establishment*, *character education*, *holistic education*, *moral development*, and *values-based learning*. The search process follows an iterative procedure, allowing refinement of keywords and inclusion criteria as new relevant sources emerge.

Selected literature is screened based on relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to the research focus. Sources that explicitly address the relationship between education and character formation, particularly within Islamic or values-based frameworks, are prioritized. Redundant or conceptually weak sources are excluded to maintain analytical rigor.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is conducted using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. First, the selected literature is carefully read and coded to identify recurring concepts, arguments, and theoretical constructs related to character establishment and Islamic education. These codes are then grouped into broader thematic categories, such as the integration of faith and knowledge, the role of educators as moral exemplars, the importance of reflective learning, and the influence of educational environments on character formation.

Through this thematic organization, the study synthesizes insights from different sources to identify convergences and divergences in perspectives. Classical Islamic concepts—such as *iman*, *ilm*, *akhlaq*, and *amal*—are analytically connected with contemporary educational principles, including holistic learning, student-centered pedagogy, and moral resilience. This integrative analysis enables the development of a conceptual understanding of character establishment that is both rooted in Islamic tradition and responsive to modern educational challenges.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study applies several qualitative rigor strategies. First, triangulation of sources is employed by drawing from multiple types of literature, including classical texts, contemporary theoretical works, and empirical studies. This approach reduces the risk of bias and enhances the robustness of interpretations.

Second, analytical transparency is maintained by clearly outlining the data

selection and analysis procedures, allowing readers to follow the reasoning process. Third, conceptual consistency is ensured by continuously aligning the analysis with the study's central focus on holistic character establishment through Islamic Religious Education. Rather than imposing external interpretations, the analysis remains grounded in the meanings and values articulated within the selected literature.

Ethical Considerations

As a literature-based study, this research does not involve human participants and therefore does not require formal ethical clearance. Nevertheless, ethical academic practice is upheld by appropriately acknowledging all sources, avoiding plagiarism, and ensuring accurate representation of authors' ideas. Interpretations are presented respectfully and responsibly, particularly when engaging with religious and philosophical texts.

Research Limitations

While this study offers a comprehensive conceptual analysis, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data. The absence of primary empirical data means that findings are interpretive rather than experiential. However, this limitation also presents an opportunity for future research to empirically examine the proposed concepts and frameworks in specific educational settings, such as schools or universities implementing Islamic Religious Education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the qualitative thematic analysis of classical Islamic educational

thought, contemporary pedagogical frameworks, and recent empirical studies, this research identifies several key findings related to character establishment through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) using a holistic educational approach. These findings are discussed thematically to demonstrate how Islamic Religious Education functions as a transformative medium for character formation when implemented beyond a purely cognitive orientation.

Integration of Faith, Knowledge, Morality, and Action

One of the central findings of this study is that effective character establishment in Islamic Religious Education is achieved through the integration of four foundational elements: faith (*iman*), knowledge (*ilm*), moral conduct (*akhlaq*), and action (*amal*). The literature consistently emphasizes that these elements are inseparable in Islamic educational philosophy. Classical scholars argue that knowledge devoid of moral purpose risks producing intellectual competence without ethical responsibility, while moral intention without sound knowledge may lead to misguided action.

In contemporary educational practice, however, this integration is often weakened by compartmentalized curricula that treat religious knowledge as theoretical content rather than lived guidance. The findings suggest that a holistic approach to IRE repositions faith as the internal foundation of character, knowledge as a means of understanding ethical principles, moral conduct as habitual behavior, and action as the manifestation of values in real-life contexts. This integrated framework aligns with holistic education theory, which emphasizes the unity of cognitive,

affective, and behavioral domains, (Alam, 2020).

From a pedagogical perspective, this finding highlights the importance of learning experiences that encourage reflection, ethical reasoning, and moral decision-making rather than rote memorization alone. When students are guided to connect religious concepts with their personal experiences and social realities, Islamic Religious Education becomes a meaningful process of character internalization rather than mere information transfer.

The Role of Educators as Moral and Spiritual Exemplars

Another significant finding concerns the pivotal role of educators in character establishment. The reviewed literature consistently identifies teachers not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as moral and spiritual role models whose attitudes and behaviors significantly influence students' character development. In Islamic education, the concept of *uswah hasanah* (good example) is central, emphasizing that values are more effectively taught through example than instruction alone.

The discussion reveals that holistic Islamic Religious Education requires educators who embody Islamic values in their professional conduct, interpersonal relationships, and teaching practices. Students are more likely to internalize values such as honesty, discipline, compassion, and responsibility when these qualities are consistently demonstrated by their teachers. This finding resonates with contemporary character education research, which underscores the impact of teacher modeling on students' moral development, (Alobaidi, 2013).

However, the literature also points to challenges faced by educators, including heavy administrative workloads, limited professional development in character-based pedagogy, and institutional pressures to prioritize academic performance. These constraints may hinder teachers' ability to fully enact their role as character educators. Therefore, strengthening teacher preparation and ongoing professional development emerges as a crucial strategy for enhancing the effectiveness of holistic Islamic Religious Education.

Reflective and Experiential Learning as Catalysts for Character Formation

The findings further indicate that reflective and experiential learning plays a critical role in character establishment within Islamic Religious Education. Rather than relying solely on lecture-based instruction, holistic IRE incorporates reflective practices, discussion of ethical dilemmas, community engagement, and real-life application of values. Such approaches encourage students to critically examine their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in light of Islamic teachings, (Rissanen, 2018).

Reflective learning enables students to internalize values by engaging with moral questions and evaluating their actions. Experiential learning, including service-based activities and social responsibility projects, allows students to practice Islamic values in authentic contexts. This combination fosters moral awareness, empathy, and social responsibility, which are essential components of character formation, (Alobaidi, 2013).

The discussion highlights that these approaches are particularly relevant in

the digital era, where students encounter complex ethical challenges related to technology use, social media, and information consumption. By integrating reflective and experiential learning into Islamic Religious Education, educators can equip students with moral resilience and ethical judgment needed to navigate contemporary life while remaining grounded in Islamic values.

Influence of Educational Environment and School Culture

Another important result concerns the influence of educational environment and institutional culture on character establishment. The literature consistently emphasizes that character formation cannot be achieved through isolated classroom instruction alone. Instead, it requires a supportive educational ecosystem in which values are consistently reinforced through school policies, routines, interpersonal relationships, and institutional norms, (Supriyatno, 2020).

Schools that cultivate value-based cultures—characterized by mutual respect, fairness, discipline, and care—create conditions that facilitate the internalization of Islamic character values. The findings suggest that when Islamic Religious Education is supported by a congruent school culture, students experience coherence between what is taught and what is practiced. Conversely, inconsistencies between instructional messages and institutional behavior may undermine the credibility and effectiveness of character education.

This finding underscores the importance of aligning curriculum, pedagogy, leadership, and community engagement within a holistic framework. Islamic Religious Education becomes more

impactful when school leaders, teachers, staff, and families share a collective commitment to character development and ethical conduct.

Holistic Islamic Religious Education in the Context of Modern Challenges

The discussion also reveals that a holistic approach enables Islamic Religious Education to respond adaptively to contemporary challenges, including globalization, moral pluralism, and digital transformation. Rather than positioning Islamic values in opposition to modernity, holistic IRE integrates critical thinking, ethical reflection, and social engagement, allowing students to engage constructively with diverse perspectives while maintaining moral clarity, (Suyadi, 2018).

The findings suggest that holistic Islamic Religious Education fosters moral resilience—defined as the capacity to uphold ethical principles amid changing social and cultural pressures. By nurturing spiritual awareness alongside intellectual and social competencies, IRE prepares learners to participate responsibly in modern society without losing their ethical and religious identity.

This aligns with broader educational discourse that calls for value-based education capable of addressing not only academic outcomes but also the moral and social dimensions of human development. Islamic Religious Education, when implemented holistically, contributes to this goal by offering a value framework rooted in transcendence, responsibility, and compassion, (Aşlamacı, 2017).

Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that character establishment through Islamic Religious Education is most effective when approached holistically. The integration of faith, knowledge, morality, and action; the central role of educators as exemplars; the use of reflective and experiential learning; and the cultivation of supportive educational environments collectively form a comprehensive framework for character formation.

The discussion suggests that Islamic Religious Education should be re-envisioned not merely as a curricular subject but as a transformative educational process embedded within the broader educational system. This perspective has important implications for curriculum development, teacher education, and educational policy. By prioritizing holistic character establishment, Islamic Religious Education can remain relevant and impactful in addressing the moral challenges of contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined character establishment through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) using a holistic educational approach, drawing on classical Islamic educational thought, contemporary pedagogical theories, and recent scholarly literature. The findings confirm that Islamic Religious Education possesses strong conceptual and practical potential to function as a transformative force in character formation when it transcends a purely cognitive orientation and is implemented as an integrated educational process.

The study concludes that effective character establishment in Islamic Religious Education is rooted in the integration of faith (*iman*), knowledge (*ilm*), moral conduct (*akhlaq*), and action (*amal*). These elements form an inseparable framework in Islamic educational philosophy and serve as the foundation for holistic character development. When religious knowledge is meaningfully connected to ethical reflection and real-life practice, Islamic Religious Education moves beyond information transmission and becomes a process of value internalization and moral transformation.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the critical role of educators as moral and spiritual exemplars. Teachers are not only instructional agents but also central figures in shaping students' character through modeling, guidance, and consistent ethical behavior. The effectiveness of holistic Islamic Religious Education is therefore closely linked to the personal integrity, pedagogical competence, and moral commitment of educators, supported by continuous professional development and institutional support.

This study also highlights the importance of reflective and experiential learning in fostering character formation. Learning approaches that encourage reflection, ethical reasoning, and engagement with real-world moral challenges enable students to develop moral awareness, empathy, and social responsibility. In the context of rapid technological and social change, such approaches are particularly vital for cultivating moral resilience and ethical judgment among learners.

In addition, the findings underscore that character establishment cannot be

achieved in isolation from the broader educational environment. A supportive school culture, aligned policies, and collective commitment from educational stakeholders are essential in reinforcing Islamic values consistently. When Islamic Religious Education is embedded within a value-based educational ecosystem, its impact on character formation becomes more coherent and sustainable.

Overall, this study affirms that Islamic Religious Education, when implemented holistically, extends beyond its role as a curricular subject and becomes a comprehensive educational endeavor aimed at shaping ethically responsible, spiritually grounded, and socially engaged individuals. By integrating moral values with intellectual and practical dimensions of learning, Islamic Religious Education remains relevant and responsive to contemporary challenges while preserving its foundational ethical principles.

Future research is encouraged to empirically examine the implementation of holistic Islamic Religious Education in specific educational contexts, including schools and higher education institutions. Such studies may further enrich understanding of how holistic character establishment can be operationalized and evaluated in practice, contributing to the continuous development of Islamic education in an evolving global landscape.

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