



Integrating Local Wisdom and Islamic Education: Fostering Character Development in Children for Modern Challenges

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to address the moral and cultural crisis reflected in the increasing violence among children, the decline of moral guidance, and the lack of respect towards parents and teachers. Education has become trapped in a capitalist system, while culture is centered on industry and commodities. To tackle these issues, the study explores the integration of local wisdom values as a cultural heritage rooted in philosophical values, ethics, and behaviors traditionally institutionalized. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study provides a detailed analysis supported by theories for verification and justification. The results show that integrating local culture into character formation enriches children's understanding of traditions, customs, and community values. Combining Islamic education with local culture creates harmony between religious and cultural values, allowing students to appreciate their cultural roots while practicing Islamic teachings. This approach not only strengthens religious and cultural identity but also prepares students to face modern challenges with well-formed characters such as leadership, spirituality, honesty, responsibility, creativity, and cooperation. These traits are essential for developing fundamental character values.

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INTRODUCTION

Education, in its ideal form, serves as a framework for the development of human civilization, guiding individuals toward a better life. However, contemporary educational systems often face a disconnection between the theoretical ideals of shaping character and the current practices, which are heavily influenced by commercialization and external pressures. The ongoing moral crisis, as reflected in increased violence among students and a decline in moral values, demonstrates a significant gap between educational theory and practice (Suraji & Sastridharjo, 2021). Despite the ideals expressed in classical educational philosophies, the modern educational landscape does not prioritize holistic character formation, especially in the context of Islamic education.

Previous research has highlighted the various challenges facing modern education, particularly in the context of character formation. Licona (2020) discusses the increasing violence and the breakdown of moral values in educational environments, further exacerbated by peer influence and societal factors such as substance abuse and

disrespect toward authority. In line with this, the crisis in Islamic education, as identified by Musleh & Wardi (2020), is rooted in the erosion of traditional values due to globalization and the rise of materialistic individualism, which creates a disconnection between students' educational and ethical development. The erosion of values impacts the understanding of spiritual and moral teachings, especially in Islamic educational frameworks.

This research introduces a novel approach by integrating local wisdom and Islamic education to address the issues of moral decay and character formation. While previous studies have focused on either religious or cultural education separately, this study proposes a synergistic approach where local wisdom, rooted in traditional cultural values, complements Islamic education. This integration creates a more holistic character-building framework that aligns religious teachings with the cultural identity of students. By utilizing ethnopedagogy, which emphasizes cultural knowledge and practices, this study offers a unique perspective on how education can foster both moral and cultural development.

The purpose of this study is to explore how integrating local wisdom with Islamic education can effectively address the challenges of character formation in children. Specifically, the research aims to examine how local cultural values, when combined with Islamic teachings, can contribute to the development of essential character traits such as honesty, responsibility, leadership, and spirituality. The study seeks to demonstrate that a curriculum based on both local wisdom and religious education can foster well-rounded individuals capable of facing contemporary challenges with a strong moral foundation.

The argument underpinning this research is that education systems, particularly Islamic education, have become fragmented, focusing too heavily on intellectual development while neglecting character-building aspects. The integration of local wisdom values provides a bridge between cultural identity and religious teachings, offering a more comprehensive approach to education. According to Bambang Syamsul Arifin (2018), values such as *cipta* (reason), *rasa* (emotion), and *karsa* (will) must be interconnected in the educational process to ensure that students not only gain knowledge but also cultivate ethical and spiritual values. This approach creates an educational environment that nurtures the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of a child's development, aligning with both Islamic and local cultural perspectives.

The integration of local wisdom and Islamic education is especially relevant in addressing the modern-day challenges faced by students, as outlined by scholars like Piliang (2022) and Shohib & Fatimah (2023). In an age marked by materialism and cultural erosion, students need an education that connects them to their cultural roots while guiding them toward spiritual and moral excellence. This study's contribution lies in its exploration of how local values can reinforce Islamic teachings, providing students with the tools needed to navigate a rapidly changing world without losing sight of their cultural and ethical identity.

The challenges facing education today, particularly in forming well-rounded and morally grounded individuals, require a new approach that integrates cultural values

with religious teachings. By combining local wisdom with Islamic education, this study advocates for a holistic model that not only addresses the intellectual needs of students but also strengthens their moral and cultural foundations. Such an approach ensures that students grow into individuals with strong character, capable of facing the complexities of modern life with integrity, leadership, and spirituality.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research methodology employed in this study is descriptive qualitative analysis, aimed at providing a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of a specific situation. According to Westfall and Stasch, as cited in Mudrajat Kuncoro, descriptive research seeks to present a complete and clear description of the context under investigation, using analytical-argumentative explanations that are well-supported by theory for validation and justification. The analysis is concluded with a summary of the key findings (Alfatih, 2017).

In this study, descriptive qualitative research was conducted to analyze and present the data objectively and in detail, ensuring accurate and reliable results. The data sources include primary data from community leaders and secondary data from relevant books and references. Data collection techniques involve observation guidelines, interview protocols, documentation tools, and relevant documents pertaining to the research topic (Suhra, 2019).

The data analysis process follows a descriptive approach with several stages, including data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing. The goal of this analysis is to identify the various cultural values derived from local wisdom, particularly those that contribute to shaping children's character development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Concept of Values in Education

Values play a fundamental role in shaping the structure of society. In the context of social life and education, values are not only tools to measure individual behavior but also serve as the foundation for building harmony and continuity among individuals and cultures. Scholars define values in various ways, although their definitions essentially refer to the same concept. Chinaka Samuel defines values as: "Values are the ideals, customs, institutions, and practices of a society toward which the people of the group have an affective regard" (DomNwachukwu, 2010).

Values represent the ideals, customs, institutions, and practices of a society that guide its members. Meanwhile, Kluckhohn, in John W. Berry, defines values as:

"The term 'values' refers to a conception held by an individual, or collectively by members of a group, of that which is desirable, and which influences the selection of both means and ends of action from among available alternatives."

Here, values are seen as beliefs about what is desirable, shaping the means and ends of actions. Hofstede offers a broader perspective, stating: "Values are 'a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others'. Values are usually considered to be more general in character than attitudes, but less general than ideologies" (Dasen et al., 2002).

Hofstede suggests that values are broad tendencies to prefer certain situations over others, and are more general than attitudes, yet less broad than ideologies, especially in politics. Dina Mufidah et al. further define values as: "Values are what are believed to be true and accepted by individuals or societies as the main guide in determining what is good and bad, right or wrong, valuable or worthless. Values drive people's actions and give legitimacy to individual actions, shaping the identity of a group or nation" (Mufidah, 2009).

Values in Society

To understand a person's actions and attitudes in life, it is essential to consider their consistency in adhering to values—the values an individual holds in life act as a driving force behind their behavior. Harold H. Titus, in his book *Living Issues in Philosophy*, states, "Knowledge, values, and actions are essentially connected. The first function of knowledge and values is guidance to actions." Knowledge and values inherently guide actions, and every person within a society is bound by values that represent the essence of life. Nicholas Rescher asserts that, "There can be no existence without value, and no value without existence," indicating that reality is a fusion of thought and matter, facts and values, all inseparable (Parmono, 1995).

Values within society provide normative guidelines that shape thought patterns, behavior, and social interactions. These values reflect the beliefs and principles upheld by specific social groups and are passed down through generations, evolving with cultural, religious, and collective experiences. Values manifest in various forms, including moral, spiritual, and social values, playing a key role in building both individual and collective identities. As Rosita Sarifa Suhra (2020) notes, values act as beliefs or feelings that define identity and influence thought patterns, emotional responses, and behavior. Cultural practices and traditions create diverse values, such as truth, goodness, and beauty, which help maintain social harmony and the purity of life, contributing to a unique societal identity (Parmono, 1995).

The Concept of Children's Character

The term "character" originates from the Latin word *character*, meaning traits, qualities, or morals. In Arabic, character is referred to as "*khuluq*," "*sajīyah*," or "*ṭab'u*," which translates to morals, behavior, or personality (Otaya, 2014). Character encompasses moral values, ethics, attitudes, and positive behaviors expected of every individual. According to Hakimuddin Salim Didy Fantotik and Muh. Nur Rochim Maksum (2023), "Character in this context refers to aspects such as moral values, ethics, attitude, and positive behaviors that are expected to appear in individuals."

Character education aims to instill noble values in students to help them develop good personalities, reflecting their behavior toward God, themselves, others, and their environment. The goal is to improve the quality of education and outcomes, culminating in the holistic development of students' character and morals (Kurniawan & Rambe, 2024). Character is seen as an individual's personality, shaped by ethical or moral standards, such as honesty, which distinguishes them from others (Suriana, 2023). Aristotle defines character as virtuous behavior, encompassing one's relationship with

God, humanity, nature, and oneself. Jonathan Webber, in the *Journal of Philosophy*, explains that character is an accumulation of traits related to how one thinks, feels, and acts. Battistich (2006) describes character as a constellation of attitudes, actions, motivations, and skills that guide an individual's behavior, particularly in the face of injustice or emotional challenges.

According to psychological definitions, character refers to the totality of an individual's mental processes and behaviors that distinguish them from others. It involves consistent patterns of behavior, emotions, and motivations that guide decisions, especially in challenging situations (Matsumoto, 2009). Character also reflects a belief system and habits that direct an individual's actions. Thus, an individual's understanding of character influences their responses and behaviors in various contexts. A well-rounded character integrates intellectual, social, emotional, and ethical aspects, enabling individuals to make decisions that are aligned with moral and spiritual values (Ismail Suardi Wekke, Arhanuddin Salim, Yunus Salik, 2018). Thomas Lickona defines character education as an intentional effort to instill values that guide behavior in a socially responsible and ethical manner. He emphasizes that individuals with strong character can lead and bring about positive change due to their integrity, wisdom, courage, and reliability (Blackford et al., 2014).

Character education, especially in the context of children, should be approached by considering local wisdom and cultural values. These values help shape children's identities and moral compasses, contributing to the development of their character. According to E.B. Tylor and Koentjaraningrat, local wisdom or culture involves a complex system of knowledge, beliefs, arts, moral systems, and traditions that guide human life (Zulkarnaen, 2022). The integration of cultural wisdom with character education strengthens the ethical and spiritual dimensions of a child's development, ensuring they grow into responsible and virtuous individuals ready to contribute to society.

CONCLUSION

The increasing violence among children, poor moral guidance, lack of respect for parents and teachers, and the prevalence of dishonesty are serious concerns. Education has become trapped in a capitalist commercial system, while culture is centered on industry and commodities. To address these issues, an approach rooted in local wisdom values is needed, based on traditional philosophies, ethics, and behaviors that have been passed down culturally.

Local wisdom values are crucial in shaping children's character, as they inherit the ability to reason, compare, and decide their actions. Emotions drive children's motivation and behavior towards good, while their will strengthens adherence to religious teachings. Moreover, cultural values preserve harmony and the purity of life, reflecting the unique identity of each community, including knowledge, beliefs, arts, morality, science, law, and customs. Therefore, shaping children's character through local cultural wisdom, within the context of Islamic education, is acceptable as long as it aligns with Islamic values, as emphasized by scholars like Sayyed Hossein Nasr, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, and Muhammad Qutb. These scholars believe that Islamic

education complements character formation, aiming for a balanced development of spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic aspects of children, preparing them to become responsible khalifah on Earth with strong character.

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