



Constructing Character: The Implementation of Constructivist Learning in Islamic Moral Education

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to examine how constructivist learning was planned, implemented, and evaluated in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction and how it contributed to students' character formation. Moral education remains dominated by memorization, creating a gap between religious knowledge and conduct. Constructivist pedagogy offers contextual, dialogic, and reflective learning for developing moral reasoning and value internalization. A qualitative single-case study was conducted at Madrasah in east Java. Data were collected through nonparticipant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, then analyzed using condensation, display, and verification. Findings showed that moral dilemmas activated prior knowledge and increased participation. Collaborative discussion enabled students to compare perspectives and justify moral choices. Teacher scaffolding deepened reasoning, although direct explanation occasionally reappeared. Reflection connected classroom concepts with personal commitments, but its depth varied. Institutional policies and learning documents supported value-oriented instruction. However, uneven planning, broad assessment indicators, limited professional development, and partial coordination constrained consistency. Theoretically, the study advances an integrated model linking experience, dialogue, scaffolding, reflection, and institutional support. Practically, it highlights the need for structured facilitation, authentic assessment, and cross-context reinforcement to sustain character development.

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INTRODUCTION

Moral Faith Education plays a strategic role in preparing students to make ethical decisions amid social change, digital culture, and rapid information flows. Its purpose extends beyond mastering concepts of faith and morality to

interpreting values, considering the consequences of actions, and applying them in daily life. Constructivist learning supports these goals by strengthening motivation, engagement, learning strategies, and problem-solving through experience, dialogue, and reflection (Dada et al., 2022; Do et al., 2023; Tsai et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022). This approach is particularly relevant during adolescence because it can help students internalize, justify, and practice moral teachings responsibly in complex social relationships.

A persistent problem in religious education is the gap between students' normative knowledge and their everyday moral behavior. Instruction often remains teacher-centered and emphasizes memorizing definitions, religious propositions, and moral classifications, leaving limited space for students to question, connect, and apply teachings to authentic situations. Consequently, religious content may be understood as information to remember rather than as a framework for addressing value conflicts, peer pressure, digital communication, and social responsibility. Participatory methods, meaningful memorization, and critical-ethical thinking have been shown to improve learning interest, mastery, and religious reasoning (Ciptaningsih & Rofiq, 2022; Elzahra, 2022; Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). The central challenge is therefore transforming religious knowledge into personal understanding, moral judgment, and consistent action.

Previous studies indicate that students participate more actively when religious instruction includes discussion, projects, case studies, contextual examples, and reflection. However, these practices are not always implemented systematically. Group activities may be used without questions that encourage students to construct reasons, compare perspectives, or connect moral concepts with personal experience. Assessment also tends to prioritize cognitive achievement, while value internalization, changes in reasoning, and behavioral consistency remain difficult to document. Studies on project-based learning, religious moderation, and character education confirm the benefits of active learning while emphasizing the need for more focused character assessment (Firdaus et al., 2023; Hidayat et al., 2025; Mufidah et al., 2025). This reveals a gap between using active methods and applying constructivist principles comprehensively and sustainably.

Recent literature has examined constructivism through project-based learning, collaborative learning, problem-solving, and learner autonomy. Syahid et al. (2023) found that constructivist models consistently improve learning outcomes, while Subaedah et al. (2023) confirmed their contribution to conceptual understanding and application. In Islamic education, project-based learning has also increased engagement and achievement (Firdaus et al., 2023), while Fadlillah et al. (2024) showed that constructivist pedagogy can strengthen religious moderation through dialogue and experience interpretation.

Nevertheless, many studies treat constructivism mainly as an intervention for measuring outcomes, motivation, or attitudes. Research explaining how its principles are translated into planning, classroom interaction, scaffolding, reflection, and moral assessment remains limited, especially in madrasah education.

Another limitation is that constructivism in Islamic education is often discussed conceptually or across broad religious subjects. Ferianto et al. (2024) related constructivism to Islamic educational thought, while Nurhasanah (2025) emphasized its potential to create active and meaningful religious learning. Studies of Moral Faith Education have shown that varied methods can improve learning interest and character formation, but they have not fully explained the relationships among implementation components (Elzahra, 2022; Mufidah et al., 2025). Consequently, limited attention has been given to how prior knowledge, cognitive conflict, dialogue, teacher assistance, and moral assessment operate as an integrated process. This study addresses that gap by examining implementation mechanisms, supporting conditions, constraints, and the quality of students' value internalization.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating six constructivist dimensions into one analytical framework: activation of prior knowledge, presentation of contextual moral problems, collaborative dialogue, investigation, scaffolding, and authentic reflection and assessment. The framework evaluates not only teaching-method variation but also the alignment among instructional design, teacher roles, student activities, and value-internalization goals. Discussion or group work cannot automatically be considered constructivist when answers remain fully determined by the teacher and students' experiences are not used as sources of meaning. Therefore, the study also examines changes in students' understanding and moral reasoning rather than focusing solely on test achievement. Its findings are expected to provide a comprehensive implementation map, operational evaluation indicators, and a basis for contextual and sustainable improvement in Moral Faith Education.

Accordingly, this study investigates how constructivist learning is planned, implemented, and evaluated; how teachers and students perform their roles; and which factors support or constrain its application in Moral Faith Education. It assumes that meaningful learning occurs when teachers shift from information transmitters to facilitators who activate prior knowledge, present contextual problems, guide dialogue, provide appropriate scaffolding, and encourage reflection. Conversely, participatory activities do not necessarily produce knowledge construction when students merely follow procedures without opportunities to reason and connect values with experience. Theoretically, the study clarifies the characteristics of constructivism in moral-religious education. Practically, it offers a basis for improving instructional

strategies, interactions, and assessment. Methodologically, its framework can evaluate the consistency among constructivist principles, classroom practices, and sustainable character-formation goals.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used an embedded qualitative single-case study design to examine constructivist learning in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction and its role in students' character formation. The case was bounded in one Islamic junior secondary school, with embedded units including teacher practices, student engagement, institutional support, and character outcomes. A qualitative approach was chosen to explore meanings, experiences, and interactions in context rather than measure effectiveness statistically (Lim, 2025). The single-case design enabled in-depth analysis of how constructivist principles were enacted and how they influenced moral-value internalization. It also integrated multiple data sources to build a holistic account of scaffolding, cognitive conflict, collaboration, reflection, and character development (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The aim was analytical understanding of processes and context, not causal generalization.

The study was conducted at MTs Sunan Ampel, Kasembon, Malang Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The site was purposively selected for three reasons. First, the school was shifting from teacher-centered, memorization-based learning to more student-centered and dialogic instruction, aligning with constructivist inquiry. Second, its semi-rural context allowed examination of how pedagogical innovation interacts with religious traditions, institutional norms, and community expectations. Third, the school provided strong access to classrooms, teachers, students, and documents for sustained data collection. The site was chosen for its contextual relevance rather than for the representativeness of Indonesian madrasahs. These considerations followed purposive selection principles emphasizing relevance, richness, and access, and they supported transparency and transferability (Cena et al., 2024).

Data were collected through nonparticipant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to ensure triangulation. Observations focused on prior knowledge activation, moral problem presentation, questioning, cognitive conflict, collaboration, scaffolding, reflection, and student engagement, supported by detailed field notes. Interviews with teachers explored planning, constructivist strategies, challenges, scaffolding, and character assessment. Students were selected using the maximum variation sampling approach (active, moderate, and less active) to capture diverse experiences, and they were asked about their understanding, participation, reflection, and moral application beyond class. The vice principal provided curriculum information, while counselors and homeroom teachers offered behavioral insights outside class. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Documents such as lesson

plans, syllabi, materials, journals, and assessment records were analyzed to compare intended, enacted, and documented learning. This strengthened evidence credibility and traceability (Schlunegger et al., 2024).

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014): data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Transcripts, field notes, and documents were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and categorized. A hybrid deductive–inductive approach was applied, using constructivist concepts (prior knowledge activation, cognitive conflict, collaboration, scaffolding, reflection, authentic assessment) alongside emerging codes from the data. These were organized into themes on instructional practice, student engagement, moral internalization, institutional support, and constraints. Findings were displayed in matrices and narratives that compared across sources and linked teaching practices to student responses. Conclusions were continuously verified against data and alternative interpretations. Trustworthiness was ensured through source and method triangulation, and member checking with educators, used as a complementary validation strategy (Lloyd et al., 2024). Reflexive memos documented analytic decisions and researcher influence, supporting credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency (Ahmed, 2024; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings revealed three main themes regarding the implementation of constructivist learning in *Akidah Akhlak*: (1) constructivist learning as active meaning construction through contextual moral engagement, (2) collaborative interaction and reflective processes as mechanisms for developing moral understanding, and (3) institutional and pedagogical conditions that shape the consistency of implementation and character formation outcomes. Overall, the data indicated that constructivist practices enabled students to connect religious and moral concepts with lived experiences, although the depth of participation and internalization varied depending on instructional quality, classroom dynamics, and contextual constraints.

Constructivist Learning as Active Meaning Construction through Contextual Moral Engagement

The first finding demonstrates a pedagogical shift from the transmission of predetermined moral knowledge toward a learning process that encouraged students to construct meaning from their prior knowledge and everyday experiences. Interview data indicated that the teacher no longer positioned textbook explanations and lectures as the sole sources of learning. Instead, moral concepts were introduced through questions, narratives, and cases that were familiar to students. These included academic dishonesty, peer pressure,

disrespectful communication, bullying, misuse of social media, and neglect of personal responsibilities. Such contextualization was intended to help students understand that the principles discussed in *Akidah Akhlak* were not merely abstract religious prescriptions but practical guidelines for interpreting and responding to situations encountered in daily life.

The *Akidah Akhlak* teacher explained that contextual questions were deliberately used to uncover students' initial understanding before new concepts were discussed. The teacher stated that beginning a lesson with a definition often resulted in passive participation because students tended to wait for the correct answer. In contrast, presenting a familiar moral problem prompted them to express opinions grounded in their own experiences. The teacher also acknowledged that students' initial responses were not always conceptually appropriate. However, these responses provided an important starting point for identifying misconceptions, incomplete reasoning, and inconsistencies between students' moral knowledge and actual behavior. The teacher therefore perceived students' prior understanding not as an obstacle to be eliminated, but as a pedagogical resource that could be examined and reconstructed through classroom dialogue.

Student interviews supported the teacher's account. Students reported that they found the subject easier to understand when moral concepts were connected to concrete experiences rather than explained exclusively through definitions and scriptural references. An actively participating student noted that discussions about honesty became more meaningful when they addressed cheating, copying homework, and concealing mistakes from parents. A moderately participating student similarly explained that cases involving social media communication encouraged reflection because the situations resembled interactions students had outside the classroom. However, less active students indicated that they sometimes found it difficult to explain the religious basis of their opinions, even when they could identify which behavior was considered right or wrong. This variation suggests that contextual engagement increased accessibility and participation but did not automatically produce equally developed moral reasoning among all students.

Corroborating informants also identified changes in the character of classroom participation. The vice principal for curriculum observed that the use of contextual problems had gradually increased students' willingness to ask questions and provide examples during Islamic education lessons. The guidance and counseling teacher similarly reported that students were increasingly able to recognize the relationship between classroom values and behavioral issues addressed in counseling, particularly those concerning peer conflict, offensive language, responsibility, and honesty. Nevertheless, both informants emphasized that the ability to discuss moral issues did not always translate directly into consistent behavioral change. Some students could articulate

appropriate moral positions during lessons but continued to need reminders and supervision when faced with similar situations outside the classroom. These accounts indicate that the construction of contextual meaning supported moral awareness, while character internalization remained a gradual and incomplete process.

Overall, the interview findings show that constructivist learning was reflected in the teacher's efforts to activate prior knowledge, contextualize religious values, and encourage students to develop interpretations through guided engagement. Students were not treated merely as recipients of fixed information but as participants whose experiences and initial assumptions became part of the learning process. Nevertheless, the shift remained partial because the teacher continued to exercise substantial interpretive authority. When students' conclusions were incomplete, overly subjective, or inconsistent with the intended religious principles, the teacher provided clarification and directed them toward a normatively appropriate interpretation. Thus, active meaning construction did not eliminate teacher guidance; rather, it repositioned such guidance as a mechanism for connecting students' lived experiences with the theological and ethical framework of *Akidah Akhlak*.

Table 1. Interview Evidence Supporting Active Meaning Construction

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Akidah Akhlak teacher	"I usually begin with a situation that the students may have experienced. When I provide the definition directly, they tend to remain silent and wait for my explanation. When I present a case, they begin to express different opinions."	Activation of prior knowledge through contextual problems
Akidah Akhlak teacher	"Some answers are not immediately correct, but I do not reject them directly. I ask why they think that way and what consequences may result from the action."	Cognitive conflict and guided meaning construction
Actively participating student	"The lesson is easier to understand when the teacher discusses situations such as cheating or lying to parents because those things can happen in our daily lives."	Connection between moral concepts and lived experience
Moderately participating student	"When we discussed comments on social media, I realized that words written online can also hurt other people and must be morally accountable."	Contextual interpretation of moral responsibility
Less active student	"I often know that an action is wrong, but sometimes I cannot explain the reason or mention the religious principle clearly."	Variation in the depth of moral reasoning
Vice principal for curriculum	"Students are now more willing to provide examples and ask questions. They do not only listen to the teacher's explanation as they did previously."	Shift from passive reception to active participation.
Guidance and counseling teacher	"Several issues discussed in counseling, such as insulting friends or avoiding responsibility, have also been discussed in the classroom. Students can recognize the connection, although their behavior still needs reinforcement."	Connection between classroom learning and behavioral awareness

Table 1 indicate that constructivist learning in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction was implemented by connecting moral concepts with contextual problems familiar to students. Presenting cases related to cheating, lying, social media comments, insulting peers, and responsibility activated students' prior knowledge and encouraged them to express opinions rather than passively receive definitions. The teacher's use of probing questions, instead of directly rejecting incorrect responses, created cognitive conflict and guided students in examining the reasons and consequences underlying moral actions. This approach helped students relate religious values to everyday experiences and develop greater awareness of moral responsibility. However, the variation in students' participation and ability to explain religious principles shows that the depth of moral reasoning was not uniform and required differentiated scaffolding. Accounts from the vice principal and guidance counselor further suggest a shift toward active classroom participation and an emerging connection between classroom learning and behavioral awareness, although consistent behavioral application still required continued reinforcement.

Collaborative Interaction and Reflective Processes in Developing Moral Understanding

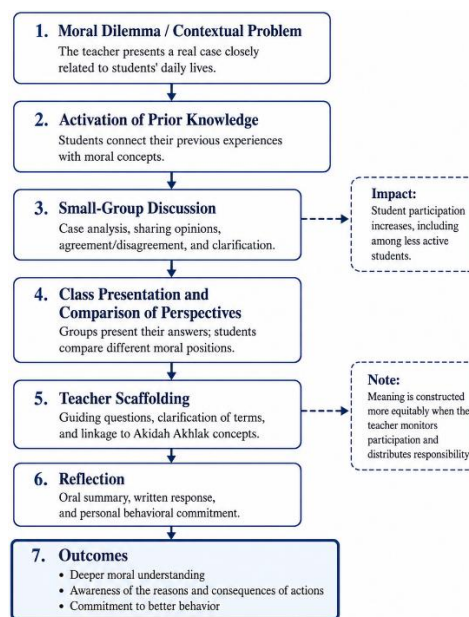
Classroom observations showed that collaborative interaction was implemented primarily through small-group discussion, case analysis, and whole-class presentation. Field notes indicated that students were generally more responsive when asked to discuss a moral dilemma with peers before presenting their answer to the entire class. During a lesson addressing honesty and responsibility, for example, students examined a situation in which an individual concealed a friend's misconduct to protect the friendship. The observed groups responded differently: some prioritized loyalty, while others emphasized honesty and accountability. This variation created opportunities for students to compare moral positions and recognize that everyday decisions often involve competing social and ethical considerations. The activity therefore moved students beyond merely identifying prohibited and commendable behavior toward considering the reasons and consequences underlying moral choices.

Observation data also indicated that small-group interaction provided a more accessible participation space for students who rarely spoke during whole-class discussion. Less confident students were observed contributing short examples, agreeing or disagreeing with their peers, and asking for clarification within their groups. More active students frequently assumed informal leadership roles by reading the task, summarizing group opinions, and preparing the presentation. However, participation was not consistently

balanced. In several groups, one or two students dominated the discussion, while other members recorded the answer without expressing an independent interpretation. The teacher responded by moving between groups, directing questions toward quieter students, and asking each member to contribute an example. These observations demonstrate that collaborative arrangements increased opportunities for participation, but equitable meaning construction depended on active teacher monitoring and deliberate distribution of responsibility.

Teacher scaffolding was consistently recorded as an important feature of the observed lessons. Rather than immediately evaluating students' answers as correct or incorrect, the teacher used probing questions such as "What would happen if everyone acted in that way?", "Which value is being ignored?", and "Would your decision remain the same if you were the person affected?" These questions encouraged students to reconsider initial judgments and evaluate moral problems from different perspectives. The teacher also clarified unfamiliar terms, connected students' arguments with relevant *Akidah Akhlak* concepts, and summarized the discussion after several positions had been considered. Nevertheless, observations showed that scaffolding sometimes shifted into direct explanation when students struggled to formulate an appropriate conclusion or when the remaining instructional time was limited. This pattern reflects a transitional constructivist practice in which dialogic guidance and conventional instruction coexisted within the same learning process.

Reflective activities were observed at the end of selected lessons through oral summaries, brief written responses, and personal behavioral commitments. Students were asked to identify the most important lesson, describe a similar experience, or state an action they intended to improve. Field notes showed that reflections became more specific when the teacher referred back to the moral dilemma discussed during the lesson. Students wrote commitments such as admitting mistakes, avoiding offensive comments, completing assigned responsibilities, and controlling anger during disagreements. Some responses, however, remained general, including statements such as "I will become a better person" that did not specify a concrete behavioral action. The observational evidence therefore suggests that reflection helped connect conceptual discussion with personal evaluation. Still, its depth depended on the specificity of teacher prompts, the relevance of the learning case, and students' willingness to honestly examine their own behavior. The observed learning process is summarized in Figure 1.



Source: developed from classroom observation findings

Figure 1. Flowchart of the Constructivist Learning Process

Figure 1 illustrates that constructivist learning in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction operated as a sequential and interconnected process beginning with the presentation of contextual moral dilemmas and the activation of students' prior knowledge. Small-group discussions allowed students to exchange opinions, clarify ideas, and compare different moral positions, while class presentations broadened their exposure to alternative perspectives. Teacher scaffolding, particularly through guiding questions, clarification, and connections to *Akidah Akhlak* concepts, supported students in reconsidering initial judgments and developing more reasoned moral interpretations. Reflection subsequently connected classroom discussion with personal experiences and behavioral commitments. Overall, the process contributed to deeper moral understanding, greater awareness of the reasons and consequences of actions, and emerging commitments to improved behavior, although meaningful and equitable participation remained dependent on active teacher monitoring and the distribution of responsibility among group members.

Institutional and Pedagogical Conditions Influencing Implementation and Character Formation

Document analysis showed that institutional support for active and contextual learning was reflected in curriculum and instructional planning documents. The school curriculum emphasized student participation, character strengthening, contextual learning, and the integration of religious values into everyday behavior. The analyzed lesson plans also included activities such as preliminary questioning, group discussion, case analysis, presentation, and

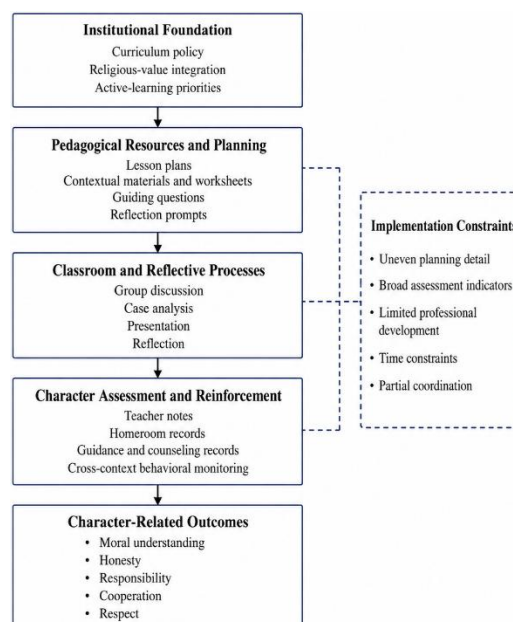
reflection. These components demonstrated formal alignment with several constructivist principles, particularly the activation of prior knowledge and the use of collaborative learning. However, the level of procedural detail varied across lesson plans. Some documents clearly specified the contextual problem, guiding questions, group-learning procedures, and reflection prompts. In contrast, others listed discussion activities without explaining how students would be guided to construct or revise their understanding.

Learning materials and student worksheets provided further evidence of efforts to connect *Akidah Akhlak* concepts with real-life situations. The reviewed worksheets contained short narratives and questions concerning honesty, responsibility, respect for parents and teachers, peer relationships, and communication through digital media. Rather than asking students only to reproduce definitions, several tasks required them to identify the values involved, evaluate the characters' behavior, explain possible consequences, and propose alternative actions. Student reflective journals similarly contained personal responses related to emotional control, respectful speech, cooperation, and academic honesty. Nevertheless, the quality of written reflection varied substantially. Some entries demonstrated a clear connection among classroom concepts, personal experience, and intended behavioral improvement, while others merely restated the lesson's moral advice without offering deeper personal interpretation.

Character-assessment documents indicated that the school attempted to evaluate learning beyond cognitive achievement. Assessment records included indicators related to discipline, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, respect, and participation. Teacher notes and homeroom records documented observable behavior, while guidance and counseling records provided additional information on recurring interpersonal or disciplinary issues. The existence of these records supported cross-context evaluation because students' behavior could be examined beyond a single *Akidah Akhlak* lesson. However, the documentation also revealed limitations. Several indicators were formulated broadly, and the criteria distinguishing different levels of behavioral achievement were not always clearly specified. Furthermore, records tended to document noticeable incidents or general ratings rather than the gradual development of moral reasoning and value internalization.

Institutional documents concerning teacher meetings and curriculum coordination demonstrated that active learning and character education were recognized as shared school priorities. Notes from curriculum discussions showed encouragement for teachers to use varied instructional strategies and relate subject content to students' daily lives. However, the documents provided limited evidence of a systematic professional-development program specifically

addressing constructivist scaffolding, moral-dilemma facilitation, or authentic character assessment. The documentation therefore supports the conclusion that institutional policy created a favorable foundation for constructivist implementation. Still, the translation of policy into consistent classroom practice depended heavily on individual teacher competence, planning quality, available instructional time, and teacher coordination. Character formation was consequently supported by a broader school framework, although its monitoring and reinforcement remained only partially integrated across instructional and noninstructional settings. The relationship among institutional support, pedagogical implementation, assessment, and character-related outcomes is summarized in Figure 2.



Source: developed from document analysis and classroom findings

Figure 2. Institutional and Pedagogical Conditions Supporting Constructivist Learning and Character Formation

Figure 2 shows that character formation was supported through an interconnected process beginning with institutional policies that emphasized active learning, religious-value integration, and student participation. These policies were translated into lesson plans, contextual materials, worksheets, guiding questions, and reflection activities, which supported collaborative and reflective classroom practices. Character assessment was reinforced through teacher notes, homeroom records, guidance and counseling records, and behavioral monitoring across different school contexts. Together, these components contributed to students' moral understanding and the development of honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and respect. However, the effectiveness and consistency of this process were constrained by uneven lesson-planning

detail, broad assessment indicators, limited professional development, instructional time restrictions, and partial coordination among teachers and school personnel.

Integrated Pattern of Constructivist Learning and Character Formation

Across the three main findings, the data suggest an integrated learning pattern in which contextual moral problems initiate engagement, collaborative dialogue and scaffolding develop understanding, and reflection supports personal internalization of values. This process is iterative rather than linear, as students continuously move between prior beliefs, social interaction, teacher guidance, and behavioral experimentation.

Character formation in *Akidah Akhlak* appears as a gradual, socially mediated process. Constructivist learning contributes most effectively when students are actively engaged in reasoning, supported through structured dialogue, and given opportunities to reflect on and apply moral values in real-life contexts. However, when interaction lacks depth, guidance, or follow-up reflection, learning tends to remain at a surface level, with little internalization.

The findings can be summarized in the following learning process:

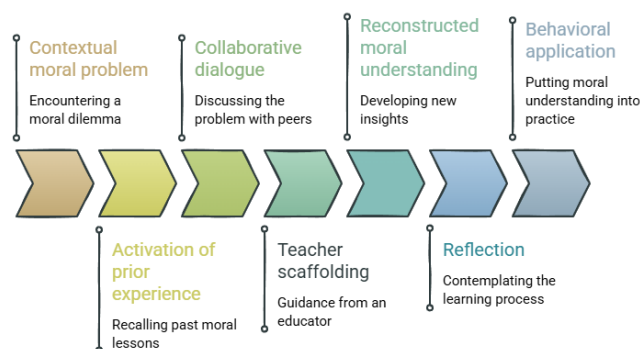


Figure 3. Journey to Moral Understanding

This model indicates that character development in *Akidah Akhlak* is not the result of information transfer alone but emerges through continuous interaction among experience, dialogue, reflection, and contextual practice.

Discussion

The findings show that constructivist *Akidah Akhlak* instruction became meaningful when moral concepts were introduced through familiar dilemmas and students' prior experiences rather than through definitions alone. This supports Do et al. (2023), who found that constructivist environments strengthen motivation and learning strategies, and Almulla (2023), who linked learner-centered environments with critical thinking and problem solving. It also corresponds with Tsai et al. (2023), whose design-thinking study showed that

authentic problems stimulate motivation and complex reasoning. However, the present study extends these findings into moral-religious education by showing that contextual accessibility did not automatically produce equally developed theological reasoning. Some students identified right and wrong actions but struggled to justify them using religious principles. Contextualization is therefore a necessary entry point, whereas disciplined moral interpretation requires sustained guidance connecting lived experience with normative Islamic knowledge, as similarly emphasized by Hermawan et al. (2025).

Collaborative discussion, case analysis, and classroom presentation expanded participation and enabled students to compare competing moral positions, confirming evidence that cooperative interaction can improve motivation, achievement, and engagement (Bećirović et al., 2022; Pan, 2023). The findings also align with Jurkowski et al. (2024), who demonstrated that students benefit from collaboration when explicitly supported to engage with peers' reasoning. Nevertheless, the dominance of active students and quieter students' dependence on teacher prompting reveal an important qualification: group work is not inherently equitable or constructivist. Collaborative structures generated opportunities, but shared meaning emerged only when the teacher monitored participation, directed questions to less vocal members, and distributed responsibility. This result challenges interpretations that treat discussion as sufficient evidence of student-centered learning. Collaboration should instead be understood as a socially regulated process whose moral and cognitive value depends on accountability, dialogic quality, and differentiated scaffolding.

Reflective activities connected conceptual discussion with personal commitments, supporting the view that constructivist religious education can deepen ethical interpretation and value internalization through dialogue and reflection (Fadlillah et al., 2024). Oral summaries, written responses, and behavioral intentions also resemble the observation–questioning–presentation sequence reported by Chien and Hwang (2022), in which structured prompts strengthened engagement and performance. Yet many reflections remained general, and behavioral change continued to require reinforcement outside the classroom. This finding is consistent with Mufidah et al. (2025), who reported that *Akidah Akhlak* values can be integrated through collaborative and case-based learning while formative character assessment remains limited. The present evidence therefore distinguishes moral awareness from character formation: students may articulate an appropriate judgment before it becomes a stable disposition. Reflection contributes most strongly when prompts demand concrete self-evaluation, behavioral specificity, follow-up evidence, and opportunities to revisit commitments across school contexts.

Institutional policy, lesson plans, contextual worksheets, and cross-context behavioral records created a favorable foundation for active learning and character education, but implementation remained uneven. This aligns with

Rodliyah et al. (2024), who emphasize curriculum management as a key condition for improving the quality and relevance of Islamic schools. It also complements Orchard and Bowen (2024), whose teacher-fellowship model highlights sustained professional learning and curriculum knowledge in improving religious education practice. In the present case, policies endorsed participation and value integration. Yet several lesson plans lacked detailed guiding questions, assessment indicators were broad, and professional development on scaffolding and facilitating moral dilemmas was limited. Thus, institutional endorsement did not guarantee pedagogical consistency. Practically, madrasahs should align curriculum policy, lesson design, teacher learning, reflection instruments, and character-assessment rubrics, while strengthening coordination among subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and counselors to monitor gradual development rather than isolated incidents.

Theoretically, this study advances constructivist accounts by conceptualizing character formation as an iterative process involving prior experience, moral conflict, collaborative reasoning, scaffolding, reflection, and cross-contextual reinforcement. Its novelty lies in integrating these dimensions with institutional conditions and observable character manifestations within a single madrasah case, rather than treating constructivism solely as an intervention that produces test-score gains. The study identifies a boundary condition: learner activity becomes meaningful knowledge construction only when dialogue is reasoned, participation is equitable, and conclusions connect with an authoritative moral framework. Practically, teachers can use contextual dilemmas, participation roles, probing questions, reflection prompts, and longitudinal behavioral evidence. The contribution is an operational process map for evaluating alignment among planning, interaction, assessment, and character outcomes. Its broader impact is to support religious education that develops ethically articulate students capable of applying Islamic values responsibly in complex social and digital situations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that constructivist learning in *Akidah Akhlak* becomes most meaningful when students are engaged in interpreting contextual moral problems through prior experience, collaborative dialogue, teacher scaffolding, and reflection. The central lesson is that character formation does not emerge from the transmission of religious knowledge alone, but develops gradually through repeated interaction among moral reasoning, social participation, personal reflection, and behavioral reinforcement across classroom and school contexts. The study's principal scientific contribution lies in integrating instructional processes, institutional conditions, and character-related outcomes within a single analytical framework, thereby extending constructivist theory

from a general learning approach into a context-sensitive model of moral-religious education. It also demonstrates that active methods cannot automatically be classified as constructivist unless students are given genuine opportunities to reason, compare perspectives, reconstruct understanding, and connect moral concepts with lived experience. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its single-case qualitative design, its focus on one Islamic junior secondary school, and its reliance on observed and reported behavioral manifestations rather than long-term measurement of character development. Future research should therefore examine multiple madrasahs across different social contexts, employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs, develop more specific indicators of moral reasoning and behavioral internalization, and evaluate how teacher professional development, digital learning environments, and school-family collaboration influence the sustainability of constructivist character formation.

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