



The Cultivation of Students' Religious Character through Qur'anic Literacy in Private Madrasah Aliyah

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to analyze how Qur'anic literacy serves as a strategic approach to cultivating students' religious character in private Islamic senior high schools. Specifically, it investigates the processes, methods, and educational practices through which Qur'anic literacy influences students' moral awareness, discipline, and spiritual integrity. Religious character formation in students is viewed as a fundamental aspect of Islamic education that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. In the context of globalization and modern popular culture, this study addresses the challenges faced by educators in reinforcing Islamic values amid competing information flows and moral relativism.

Methodology: The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Subjects were purposively selected, including the principal, vice principal for curriculum, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and students actively engaged in Qur'anic literacy activities. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation.

Main Findings: The results demonstrate that Qur'anic literacy is a primary instrument for shaping students' religious character through aspects of faith, worship, and morality. Routine activities such as recitation (*tadarus*), memorization, and Qur'anic exegesis foster spiritual discipline, courteous behavior, and social awareness.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The study highlights the role of teachers as role models, facilitators, and motivators, supported by a curriculum systematically integrating Qur'anic values across subjects. This synergy creates a religious, contextual, and sustainable educational ecosystem, shaping students into morally upright generations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education aims not only to intellectually enlighten the nation but also to shape students' moral and spiritual integrity [1], [2]. In Islamic education, character formation constitutes a core objective that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions [3], [4]. Among the essential attributes to be cultivated is religious character, which embodies faith, obedience in worship, moral discipline, and social responsibility aligned with Islamic values [5], [6].

However, nurturing this character in the modern era poses growing challenges [7]. Globalization, rapid information flows, and the influence of popular culture often introduce values contrary to Islamic principles [8], [9]. Consequently, madrasahs are expected to serve not only as institutions of knowledge transfer [10], [11], but also as centers for moral and spiritual development [12]. instilling Aqidah, worship, and noble conduct as the foundation of life [13]. These traits should manifest beyond rituals, extending to tolerance, empathy, and respect for others [14], [15].

Religious character formation is a continuous process developed through guidance, habituation, and exemplary behavior [16]. Teachers play a strategic role as role models and facilitators [17], embedding these values within students' daily lives [18]-[20]. The effectiveness of character cultivation is reflected in students' consistent worship, respectful communication, and ethical comportment consistent with Islamic moral principles, [3], [21]-[24].

The Qur'an provides a strong foundation for this process. As stated in QS. Al-Baqarah (2:121): "Those to whom We have given the Book, they read it with its true reading; they are the ones who believe in it." This verse underscores the importance of engaging with the Qur'an beyond mere recitation to include comprehension and application of its teachings. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) affirmed, "The best among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it" (Hadith al-Bukhari, no. 5027), emphasizing the transformative role of educators as agents of Qur'anic transmission and practice.

Qur'anic literacy, therefore, represents a strategic educational approach for cultivating students' religious character [25]. It encompasses reading proficiency, comprehension, appreciation, and implementation of Qur'anic values in daily life [26], [27]. Through systematic integration into learning activities [28]. Qur'anic literacy not only enhances spiritual understanding but also strengthens moral awareness and behavioral consistency [29].

Although character education has been widely examined, significant gaps remain. First, Qur'anic literacy is often confined to technical reading rather than understood as a holistic framework for value internalization [30]. Second, research on private madrasah institutions characterized by distinctive socio-cultural flexibility remains scarce compared to studies of public schools. Third, empirical evidence on the long-term effectiveness of Qur'anic literacy and the integration of teacher roles and curriculum structures in shaping students' character remains limited.

Specifically, the research seeks to answer the question: *How is Qur'anic literacy integrated into teaching and curriculum design to develop students' religious character, and to what extent is this approach effective in reinforcing Qur'anic values in the school environment?*

Within this theoretical framework, Lickona views religious character as part of moral character that governs one's relationship with God through faith, piety, and moral conduct. In the Islamic context, this is reflected through consistent worship, Qur'anic engagement, honesty, humility, and ethical restraint. Thus, character education must permeate all learning processes, particularly religious instruction, through modeling, habituation, and value-based pedagogy [31].

Grounded in this understanding, the present study investigates Qur'anic literacy as a strategic approach to building students' religious character in a private Madrasah Aliyah. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on integrating Qur'anic literacy with teacher roles and curriculum implementation within a private educational context that exhibits distinct socio-cultural characteristics. This integration offers a sustainable model for religious character formation relevant to contemporary Islamic education.

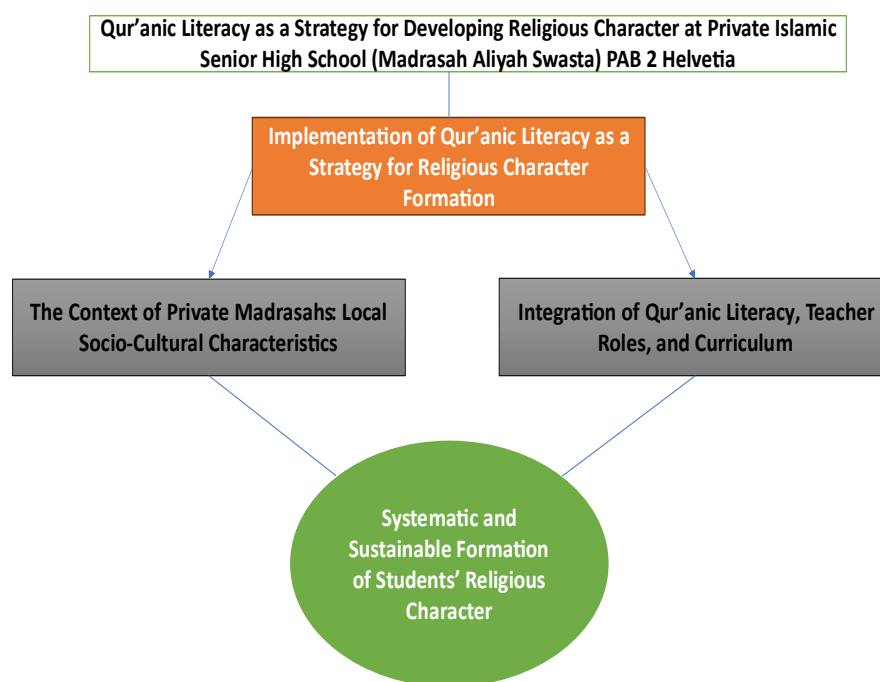


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Image Source: Personal Documentation/Researcher's Analysis Results

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of strategies for instilling religious character in students through Qur'anic literacy at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta PAB 2 Helvetia. This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal meanings, experiences, and educational practices that cannot be explained quantitatively, but rather through contextual and interpretive descriptions. The research subjects were determined purposively, including the head of the madrasah, Islamic Education (IRE) teachers, and several students who were active in Al-Qur'an literacy activities. The selection of informants was based on their involvement and relevance in the process of instilling religious character in madrasahs. Data collection techniques were carried out in three main ways. First, observation, to obtain empirical data on Qur'an literacy practices and religious habits in the madrasah environment. Second, in-depth interviews, to explore the experiences, views, and strategies applied by teachers and students regarding the internalization of religious values. Third, documentation studies, which included curriculum documents, madrasah work programs, and records of Qur'an literacy activities.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods based on the interactive model of [32], which consists of three stages: data reduction (selection and focusing on important data), data presentation (organization of data in the form of systematic narratives), and conclusion drawing (identification of patterns, meanings, and key research findings). To ensure data validity, source and technique triangulation techniques were used. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from the madrasah principal, teachers, and students, while technique triangulation was carried out by combining the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. Thus, the validity and reliability of the data obtained can be accounted for.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Al-Qur'an Literacy at PAB 2 Helvetia Private Madrasah Aliyah as an Instrument for Instilling Religious Character

The Qur'anic concept of education emphasizes the transmission of values that shape moral, spiritual, and intellectual strength. As stated in QS. An-Nisa (4:9), *"And let those fear Allah who, if they left behind them weak offspring, would fear for their welfare. Therefore, let them fear Allah and let them speak words of justice."* This verse highlights the moral responsibility of one generation to prepare the next to be strong in faith, ethics, and social awareness. Within this framework, teachers serve as moral guardians who ensure that students grow as spiritually resilient and ethically responsible individuals. Qur'anic literacy, therefore, functions as a strategic educational effort to prevent the emergence of a "weak generation" by nurturing piety, discipline, and noble character through systematic engagement with the Qur'an.

At Madrasah Aliyah Swasta PAB 2 Helvetia, Qur'anic literacy has become a central instrument in cultivating students' religious character. It is not confined to the technical skill of reciting Arabic texts with proper

tajwīd rules but also encompasses comprehension, reflection, and the application of Qur'anic teachings in daily life. By positioning the Qur'an as a source of values, the institution seeks to shape students' personalities according to Islamic principles and moral excellence. This approach reflects the school's broader vision: to be not only a center of knowledge but also a nurturing space for faith and character formation.

The principal of the madrasah underscored that Qur'anic literacy programs are a top institutional priority for moral education. He explained that daily *tadarus* sessions, short *surah* memorization, and thematic *tafsir* classes are designed not as mere routines but as part of a structured strategy to internalize Islamic values among students. He stated, *"We aim for this madrasah to be a place for character building, not just for knowledge transfer"* (Interview, July 2025). The principal further noted that these programs have demonstrably influenced student behavior, promoting politeness, worship discipline, and empathy toward others.

Religious character developed through Qur'anic literacy encompasses three interconnected aspects: *faith* (*īmān*), *worship* (*'ibādah*), and *morality* (*akhlāq*). Faith forms the theological foundation that strengthens students' spiritual connection with Allah SWT. Worship, cultivated through consistent habits such as punctual prayer and daily Qur'an recitation, develops spiritual discipline. Morality represents the visible expression of these inner values—manifested through honesty, humility, and respectful social interactions. The integration of these dimensions reflects the holistic philosophy of Islamic education, where belief, practice, and ethics are inseparable.

The Deputy Head of Curriculum explained that the implementation of Qur'anic literacy extends beyond formal religious classes through curriculum integration and extracurricular reinforcement. He elaborated, *"We ensure that Qur'anic literacy is not confined to Islamic Education lessons. Every subject incorporates Qur'anic values, and each class begins with tadarus, so students view the Qur'an as a life guide, not merely a ritual text"* (Interview, August 2025). This approach institutionalizes Qur'anic engagement across disciplines, embedding religious reflection in both academic and social learning contexts.

The Qur'anic literacy process at the madrasah employs multiple pedagogical strategies, including collective recitation, interpretive study sessions, and short *surah* memorization. These practices not only improve reading fluency but also cultivate perseverance and mindfulness. For instance, morning recitation sessions before class have become a hallmark routine that reinforces spiritual readiness and mental focus. Through such repetition, Qur'anic literacy becomes both an educational and spiritual exercise, fostering self-discipline and emotional balance.

In the realm of faith formation, Qur'anic literacy significantly contributes to strengthening students' theological understanding. Verses concerning monotheism, accountability, and moral responsibility guide students to internalize divine values and apply them in real-life decision-making. This comprehension nurtures a sense of *taqwā* (God-consciousness), forming the basis for ethical awareness and behavior. Thus, Qur'anic literacy functions as a formative tool that deepens faith while shaping ethical consciousness among the youth.

A teacher of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) emphasized that educators' roles extend beyond instruction—they act as moral exemplars who model Qur'anic values through consistent practice. He shared, *"When students observe teachers who regularly read the Qur'an, maintain their prayers, and speak politely, they naturally imitate these behaviors. Qur'anic literacy is not only theoretical but also embodied through example"* (Interview, September 2025). Such modeling reinforces the principle of *uswah hasanah* (good example), demonstrating that moral learning in Islamic education must be both observed and practiced.

The aspect of worship is equally reinforced through Qur'anic literacy. Students are guided to perceive recitation not as a mere ritual, but as an act of devotion that trains consistency and humility. Regular engagement with the Qur'an cultivates spiritual sensitivity, encouraging students to align daily behavior with divine guidance. Those involved in literacy programs exhibit higher commitment to communal prayers and a deeper sense of accountability in worship, transforming ritual acts into enduring life habits.

Students actively participating in Qur'anic literacy programs also described noticeable behavioral changes. An 11th-grade student shared, *"Morning recitation made me more disciplined in reading the Qur'an, even at home."* Another remarked, *"Studying tafsir helped me understand verses better and apply them—for instance, I avoid gossip because I remember the verse forbidding it."* Others testified that literacy sessions inspired them to pray more consistently and engage positively with peers (Interviews, July–September 2025). These testimonies indicate that Qur'anic literacy fosters personal transformation by linking textual engagement with behavioral reflection.

In addition to faith and worship, Qur'anic literacy plays a vital role in cultivating moral consciousness. Verses promoting honesty, justice, and compassion motivate students to embody these values in everyday interactions. As a result, students become more courteous, cooperative, and empathetic toward others. This demonstrates that Qur'anic literacy instills not only vertical devotion to God but also horizontal ethics in social life.

The implementation of Qur'anic literacy at the madrasah also adopts a contextualized approach. Students are encouraged to connect Qur'anic verses with contemporary issues. For example, discussions of verses on environmental stewardship are linked to local waste management problems, helping students realize that the

Qur'an offers practical moral guidance relevant to modern challenges. Through this integrative method, Qur'anic literacy becomes an applied form of moral education, bridging revelation with daily life.

Qur'anic literacy has also cultivated a strong religious culture within the madrasah environment. The habitual sound of Qur'an recitation, teachers' exemplary behavior, and routine *tafsir* sessions contribute to an atmosphere that promotes collective spirituality. Over time, these practices create an ecosystem where moral discipline and piety are internalized naturally, making the school environment a microcosm of Islamic ethical life.

Furthermore, Qur'anic literacy nurtures reflective awareness among students. Reflection on verses concerning honesty, trust, and accountability enables them to evaluate personal actions and moral responsibilities. For instance, understanding verses on *amānah* (trustworthiness) encourages students to act responsibly in academic and familial duties. This reflective dimension strengthens self-awareness, ensuring that religiosity translates into integrity and ethical decision-making.

Beyond its formative impact, Qur'anic literacy also functions as a preventive and corrective mechanism against negative behavior. Regular engagement with the Qur'an helps students redirect their attention from unproductive activities and internalize moral prohibitions against gossip, immorality, or arrogance. Moreover, verses emphasizing repentance and forgiveness serve a rehabilitative function, motivating students to reform undesirable behavior. Hence, Qur'anic literacy acts as a continuous process of moral renewal and self-improvement.

Lastly, Qur'anic literacy fosters social responsibility and compassion. Verses encouraging charity (*zakat* and *infaq*) inspire students to participate in community service and cultivate a sense of empathy toward the less fortunate. This demonstrates that true religiosity extends beyond personal worship, encompassing active contribution to society.

By making Qur'anic literacy an integral component of its educational framework, Madrasah Aliyah Swasta PAB 2 Helvetia has successfully instilled contextual and applicable Islamic values. Students are not only trained to read and memorize but also to embody the Qur'an as a moral compass in thought, speech, and action. Consequently, Qur'anic literacy emerges as an effective strategy for shaping religious character, enhancing moral resilience against globalization's negative influences, and fostering a socially conscious generation rooted in Islamic ethics.

3.2. The Role of Teachers and Curriculum in Integrating Qur'anic Literacy at PAB 2 Helvetia Private Madrasah Aliyah

Teachers occupy a strategic and irreplaceable position in shaping students' religious character through Qur'anic literacy. Their role extends beyond knowledge delivery to encompass modeling, mentoring, and facilitating the internalization of Qur'anic values in everyday life. At Madrasah Aliyah Swasta PAB 2 Helvetia, teachers are regarded as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*), presenting the Qur'an not merely as a text to be read but as a living guide to ethical and intellectual behavior. As the principal affirmed, "*We aim for this madrasah to be a place for character building, not just for knowledge transfer*" (Interview, July 2025).

This statement reflects the institution's commitment to transforming Qur'anic literacy into a systematic moral framework. Activities such as morning *tadarus*, short *sūrah* memorization, and thematic *tafsir* classes serve as mechanisms for spiritual discipline and ethical habituation. These initiatives have been shown to influence students' manners, worship discipline, and social empathy—signs of tangible moral transformation aligned with Islamic educational ideals.

The success of Qur'anic literacy largely depends on teachers' ability to exemplify and embody the values they teach. When educators demonstrate sincerity in worship, consistency in Qur'an recitation, and politeness in interaction, students naturally emulate such behavior. This process corresponds with Lickona's principle of *moral modeling*, where students internalize values through observation and imitation [31]. As one IRE teacher stated, "*When students see teachers consistently reading the Qur'an and maintaining their worship, they find it easier to imitate them. Qur'anic literacy is not just theory, but lived example*" (Interview, September 2025).

Teachers also serve as facilitators who contextualize Qur'anic teachings across disciplines. Verses emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge are integrated into lessons on science or history, reinforcing that the Qur'an remains relevant across all domains of life. Such integration reflects the holistic concept of Islamic pedagogy where knowledge, faith, and morality coexist harmoniously [22].

From a curricular standpoint, the madrasah has institutionalized Qur'anic literacy within its formal schedule. Daily *tadarus* sessions, inclusion of Qur'anic principles in general subjects, and structured memorization programs ensure that engagement with the Qur'an becomes habitual rather than incidental. The Deputy Head of Curriculum explained, "*We ensure that Qur'anic literacy is not only present in Islamic Education classes, but in every subject, so that students see the Qur'an as a guide for life, not merely a ritual text*" (Interview, August 2025).

This curriculum design reflects the guidance of QS. Al-Isra (17:9): "*Indeed, this Qur'an guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds.*" By embedding the Qur'an into every layer of learning, the curriculum functions as a structural instrument that sustains faith-based education. Similar integrative models have been observed in previous studies [5], [26], though this madrasah's approach demonstrates higher adaptability through localized and contextualized curriculum innovation.

Character formation cannot rely solely on theoretical instruction; it requires consistent practice. Habit-forming strategies such as reading the Qur'an before class, reciting prayers, and performing congregational worship create a religious *habitus* that shapes the school's moral climate. As the IRE teacher emphasized, habitual engagement strengthens intrinsic motivation and reinforces collective piety. Students are thus conditioned to see religious behavior not as external obligation but as part of their identity.

Through continuous exposure, Qur'anic literacy transitions from routine activity to internalized belief. This aligns with Lickona's framework, which identifies *moral knowing* (understanding Qur'anic values), *moral feeling* (emotional connection to the text), and *moral action* (ethical application in behavior) as the three pillars of enduring character formation [31].

Teachers are also directly involved in evaluating students' Qur'anic literacy achievements. Assessment encompasses not only reading accuracy but comprehension, contextual application, and behavioral reflection. This holistic evaluation enables educators to determine how deeply Qur'anic engagement shapes moral disposition. Teachers then refine instructional methods such as integrating digital tools, thematic discussion, or local cultural examples to maintain contextual relevance and engagement.

The integration of teachers' roles and curriculum frameworks forms a synergistic system that supports comprehensive religious character formation. Teachers act as agents of transformation, while the curriculum ensures structural sustainability. Together, they operationalize Qur'anic literacy as a dynamic process that connects intellectual, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of education.

The IRE teacher emphasized the importance of a habit-forming approach in literacy activities. He gave examples of how students are directed to always read prayers before studying, perform congregational prayers, and actively participate in *tadarus*. For him, the teacher's example is a key factor that influences students' religious attitudes. "*When students see teachers consistently reading the Qur'an and maintaining their worship, they find it easier to imitate them. So, Qur'anic literacy is not just theory, but real role modeling,*" he said (Interview, September 2025).

Comparatively, prior studies [5], [22], have demonstrated that Qur'anic literacy contributes to students' moral awareness and discipline; however, these works primarily focused on public institutions or limited classroom contexts. This research extends existing findings by highlighting the integrated role of teachers and curriculum in a private madrasah setting, characterized by localized socio-cultural adaptations and greater pedagogical autonomy. The study thereby provides empirical evidence that teacher-curriculum synergy enhances the internalization of Qur'anic values, resulting in both personal and communal transformation. In summary, the successful integration of Qur'anic literacy at PAB 2 Helvetia Private Madrasah Aliyah is sustained through the complementary roles of teachers and the curriculum. Teachers embody, facilitate, and evaluate Qur'anic values, while the curriculum institutionalizes these practices through structured learning design. This synergy produces a holistic educational environment where faith, worship, and morality converge, forming a strong foundation for religious character that is both contextually relevant and future-oriented.

4. CONCLUSION

The cultivation of students' religious character at Madrasah Aliyah Swasta PAB 2 Helvetia demonstrates that Qur'anic literacy plays a pivotal role in shaping faith, worship, and morality. This form of literacy extends beyond technical reading skills to encompass comprehension, internalization, and practical application of Qur'anic values in daily life. Through structured activities such as recitation (*tadarus*), memorization, *tafsir* study, and worship practices, students develop polite conduct, disciplined behavior, and strong social awareness. These findings confirm that Qur'anic literacy functions as a moral foundation capable of fortifying students against the moral disruptions of globalization and popular culture, which often diverge from Islamic principles.

Furthermore, the role of teachers and the curriculum emerges as crucial in integrating Qur'anic values into character education. Teachers act as role models, facilitators, motivators, and moral guides who inspire students to love the Qur'an and to regard it as a lifelong compass for behavior and decision-making. Concurrently, the curriculum provides an institutional framework that ensures Qur'anic literacy is implemented systematically across disciplines rather than confined to religious education. The collaboration between teachers, curriculum design, and school culture creates a cohesive religious ecosystem in which the formation of character becomes continuous, contextual, and holistic.

In conclusion, this study asserts that Qur'anic literacy, when supported by exemplary teachers and an integrated curriculum, effectively produces a generation that is faithful, virtuous, and intellectually competitive. It also highlights the distinctive potential of private madrasahs to innovate in developing Qur'an-based character education strategies that are adaptive to the socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary society. Such findings underscore the enduring relevance of Qur'anic literacy as both an educational paradigm and a transformative moral framework for the modern era.

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