

## Theological Value of Arabic Calligraphy Art in the Formation of Religious Character in Islamic Boarding Schools

Muhib Ali Hasan Ristia<sup>1,\*</sup>, Abd. Haris<sup>1</sup>, Apri Kurniasih<sup>2</sup>, Kunainah Afroyim<sup>2</sup>, Arsan Isro<sup>3</sup>,  
Damanhuri<sup>1</sup>, Bima Fandi Asy'arie<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darussalam Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Institut Agama Islam Nusantera Ash-Shiddiqiyah Sumatera Selatan, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to identify the theological values embedded in the study of Arabic calligraphy and to contribute to the formation of the religious character of Islamic boarding school students.

**Methodology:** This study employed an interpretive research paradigm with a qualitative approach, conducted through interviews with 12 teachers (ustadz) and focus group discussions (FGD) with 6 students. The data obtained were analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques. Furthermore, the researchers conducted observations and document analysis to strengthen the data presented.

**Main Findings:** The findings of this study indicate that theological values in Arabic calligraphy are integrated into three main aspects: spirituality, Islamic aesthetics, and morality. In the spiritual aspect, the values of tauhidiah (monotheism), ikhlas (sincerity), dhikrullah (remembrance of Allah), tadabbur (religious service), and tazkiyatul nafsi (observance of one's soul) are found. In the Islamic aesthetic, the values of jamal (community), creativity, patience, and perseverance are essential to the learning process. In the moral aspect, calligraphy instills amanah (trustworthiness), tawadhu' (religious tolerance), and ukhuwah (brotherhood). Learning Arabic calligraphy contributes to strengthening spirituality, forming personal morals, instilling etiquette, developing Islamic aesthetics, and strengthening students' socio-religious character.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The novelty of this study has contributed to the strengthening of arts-based Islamic education that integrates theological values, aesthetic practices, and holistic character formation in a sustainable manner. This research has implications suggesting that Arabic calligraphy can be used as an effective pedagogical instrument for shaping socio-religious character education for students in Islamic boarding schools.

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#### Corresponding Author:

Muhib Ali Hasan Ristia,

UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Jalan Gajayana No. 50, Jatimulyo, Kec. Lowokwaru, Kota Malang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

Email: [230101310017@student.uin-malang.ac.id](mailto:230101310017@student.uin-malang.ac.id)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of religious character is one of the fundamental orientations of Islamic education, because education in this tradition does not stop at the transmission of knowledge, but is directed at the internalization of values that shape the personality, spiritual awareness, and moral orientation of students [1]. In this context, the need for a learning model that is able to integrate cognitive, affective, psychomotor and spiritual dimensions is becoming increasingly important [2]. Islamic educational institutions require pedagogical media that are not only instructionally effective, but also ethically and spiritually transformative [3]. One of the mediums of Arabic calligraphy art, especially when positioned not merely as a visual skill, but as a learning practice that connects beauty, discipline, appreciation of meaning, and character building (Alashari, 2022).

Arabic calligraphy has a distinctive position in Islamic civilization because it is directly related to the Qur'an as the main source of teachings and values [5]. The activity of writing letters and verses cannot be understood only as an artistic expression, but also as a form of reverence for revelation, ethical maintenance of sacred texts, and spiritual practice that demands earnestness [6]. From the perspective of character education, these conditions show that Arabic calligraphy has the potential to become a comprehensive pedagogical instrument [7]. The process of learning calligraphy not only forms technical skills, but also trains self-control, perseverance, consistency, responsibility, and inner connection with spiritual values to build awareness of trust and moral integrity [8], [9].

Although studies of Arabic character education and calligraphy have shown significant progress, there are still a number of fundamental gaps that require academic attention. On a theoretical level, most research tends to rest on the aesthetic perspective of Islamic art or on the concept of character education in the general sense, without making theological values the basis of explicit and systematic analysis [5], [10], [11]. As a result, the construction of the relationship between Arabic calligraphy practice and the formation of religious character has not been adequately explained through a complete conceptual framework [12]. A number of studies confirm that art has an important contribution to character formation [13], [14]. Meanwhile, other studies position art only as a supporting medium that does not have a substantive role in strengthening the spiritual and moral dimensions of students [15].

Some research is still dominated by a descriptive approach that only captures the process of internalizing values in depth, contextually, and analytically. The learning process based on Arabic calligraphy art is more often understood at the level of external manifestation than as a pedagogical process that has the power to transform the formation of religious personality [16]–[18]. Furthermore, the topic of integrating theological values in the learning of Arabic calligraphy as a means of forming religious character is still relatively limited in the literature [19]. This condition shows a real gap from the empirical facts in the field, which shows that the practice of calligraphy containing spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions with an academic construction has not been fully able to articulate critical analysis coherently [20]–[22].

Based on these gaps, this research offers novelty through the development of a perspective that places the art of Arabic calligraphy not solely as an aesthetic practice, but as a pedagogical-spiritual medium for the internalization of theological values in the formation of religious character. Therefore, the difference in this study lies not only in the identification of the theological values contained in the teaching of Arabic calligraphy, but also in the explanation of the mechanisms by which these values are internalized through the learning process and contribute to the formation of religious character in a substantive way.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theological concepts are rooted in the integration of spiritual values, Islamic aesthetics, and morals in worship-oriented artistic practices [23]. Calligraphy is understood as a visual representation of the words of Allah SWT., so that the activity of writing holy verses contains the dimensions of tauhidiah, sincerity, dzikrullah, and encourages tadabbur and love for the Qur'an [24]. Repetitive and concentrated calligraphy writing practice is a means of self-purification. Aesthetically, the concept of *jamal* places beauty as an expression of *ihsan*, while creativity develops within the corridors of Islamic sharia [25]. In the aspect of morality, calligraphy instills trust, *tawadhu'*, and *ukhuwah*, so that this art is not only visual, but also forms a deep religious awareness [14].

Religious character in Islamic education is a process of internalizing values that includes spiritual, moral, and social dimensions through continuous learning experiences. Religious character is not only shown through the understanding of teachings, but also through the practice of worship, self-control, and social behavior that reflects Islamic values [1]. In this context, experiential learning such as calligraphy plays an important role in building spiritual awareness, forming personal morals such as discipline, patience, and responsibility, and instilling learning manners in the form of respect for teachers and openness to evaluation [10], [26]. In addition, collective interaction in learning also strengthens *ukhuwah* and social concern [27]. Thus, the formation of religious character takes place holistically through the integration of values, practices, and a supportive learning environment.

This study aims to identify the theological values contained in the learning of Arabic calligraphy and analyze the contribution to the process of forming the religious character of students. The focus of this research

was carried out at the Calligraphy Institute of the Qur'an (LEMKA) Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia. This research is important because it can make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of Islamic education, Islamic art, and character education, as well as provide a practical contribution to Islamic educational institutions (Islamic Boarding School) in designing a more integrative learning model between spiritual strengthening, aesthetic development, and moral development that can be understood not only as the art of writing, but as a way of spiritual education to shape human beings Religious in character.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses an interpretive research paradigm [28] with a qualitative approach [29] to explore the theological value of Arabic calligraphy in the formation of the religious character of students. Interviews are conducted with an open-ended question approach to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic. Based on the criteria that have been set, twelve were selected starting from leaders, teachers (ustadz) and the jury aged 37-72 years who were willing to be informant participants. The data was then strengthened through the involvement of six students as informants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) activity. Structured interview guide, developed from questionnaires [30] and literature review, used. After the implementation of the trial interview, several minor adjustments were made to the interview guide. Each interview resulted in approximately 500–600 words per participant, and the data obtained was then analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques in a manifest manner to achieve the research objectives to ensure the main findings according to the sub-categories.

In the interview process, the researcher selected informants from various groups to obtain more in-depth information, improve the accuracy of sample selection, and expand the relevance of the research findings. This research was carried out for six months, starting from the beginning of September 2025 to the end of February 2026. In addition, the application of a combination of coding and data grouping makes the interview analysis take place systematically and produces more reliable findings, thus enriching the understanding of the phenomenon studied in this topic study. Furthermore, the researcher conducted observations and document analysis to strengthen the exposure of the data obtained.

Table 1. Research Information Based on Informants

No	Initials	Position	Age
1	DSA	Founder and Leader of LEMKA	69
2	ISM	Treasurer of LEMKA	60
3	OJ	Head of Training Division	60
4	HM	Head of Development and Public Relations	48
5	TP	Calligraphy Teacher	38
6	AR	Calligraphy Teacher	40
7	BM	Calligraphy Teacher	37
8	ARy	Teacher of Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting	51
9	AS	Calligraphy Teacher and National Jury	53
10	AB	Calligraphy Teacher and National Jury	48
11	ASi	Leader of the Lampung Calligraphy Studio (ELKA)	57
12	Kr	LPTQ Trainers and Leaders	72
13	TE	Active Students	26
14	DNS	Active Students	23
15	AF	Active Students	25
16	ANA	Active Students	25
17	AMA	Active Students	21
18	AH	Active Students	26

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, coding and grouping informants from data collected through interviews played a crucial role in the analysis process. Grouping informants helped researchers compare and contrast information across groups or individuals, supporting an understanding of the demographic context that influenced informants' perspectives, and thus obtaining findings that aligned with the objectives of this study.

#### 3.1 Theological Values in Learning Arabic Calligraphy Art

This research reveals that the art of Arabic calligraphy has interrelated theological, aesthetic, and moral dimensions. The spiritual aspect in calligraphy reflects an appreciation of the values of monotheism, sincerity, dzikrullah, and deep tadabbur of the Qur'an. On the aesthetic side, this art highlights the beauty, innovation, and perseverance that are characteristic of its creation process. Meanwhile, in the moral dimension, Arabic calligraphy plays a role in shaping character through the values of amanah, tawadhu', and ukhuwah, which are important for strengthening social relationships and strengthening individual spirituality.

**Table 2.** Research Findings on Theological Values in Arabic Calligraphy

Aspect	Theological Values	Interview Description	Informant
Spiritual	Tauhidiah	Calligraphy writing is understood as a visual representation of the words of Allah SWT., to strengthen the awareness of monotheism and the spiritual relationship of students.	DSA, ISM & OJ
	Ikhlas	The practice of writing calligraphy is directed as worship, so that students are accustomed to writing with sincere intentions and not riya'.	HM & TP
	Dzikrullah	Every stroke of calligraphy is understood as a means of remembering Allah SWT., and thickening faith.	BM & ARy
	Tadabbur and love for the Qur'an	The writing of verses is done slowly and full of appreciation which encourages the value of tadabbur, deepens the love for the Qur'an.	AS, AB, Asi & Kr
	Khidmah	Calligraphy writing skills are directed to da'wah and religious services as a form of social service.	TP & DSA
Islamic Aesthetics	Tazkiyatul Nafsi	The mechanism of writing with repetition, concentration, and discipline in calligraphy practice is understood as mujahadah and a process of self-purification.	Ary, HM & AS
	Jamal (beauty)	The beauty of the letters, the harmony of the composition, and the elegance of the lines are understood as a homage to revelation.	AB & Kr
	Creativity	Creativity in calligraphy is developed in a directed manner, based on rules, describing Islamic expressions through the form of works.	ASi, TP & OJ
	Patience	The process of writing letters correctly requires high patience, practiced over and over again until it achieves precision and beauty.	TP & BM
Morals (Akhlak)	Perseverance	Learning calligraphy requires persistence, because mastery of beautiful writing is achieved through consistent practice and long-term sincerity.	DSA, HM & AS
	Amanah (responsibility)	Writing holy verses is seen as a trust, so that students are accustomed to being responsible, careful and maintaining the accuracy of the meaning of the writing.	AS & AB
	Tawadhu' (humble)	Learning calligraphy forms an attitude of humility through respect for teachers, readiness to accept correction, and rejection of arrogance.	TP, OJ & BM
Observation:	Ukhuwah (togetherness)	Collective teaching fosters brotherhood through mutual assessment, providing input, and supporting the development of work.	Kr & ARy
	Learning the art of Arabic calligraphy takes place through the practice of writing holy verses, emphasizing precision, repetition, and appreciating the meaning. This activity integrates spiritual values, Islamic aesthetics, and morals, thus fostering an awareness of worship, discipline, and humility and brotherhood in learning interactions.		

As the data findings in the table above underline that, the theological value in the art of Arabic calligraphy to form religious character for students includes: Calligraphy learning functions as a medium of spiritual internalization that connects writing activities with monotheism, sincerity, dhikr, tadabbur, devotion, and self-purification. Writing holy verses is not understood as a mere technical exercise, but as a worship practice that strengthens the inner relationship of the students with Allah SWT and the Qur'an. The art of

calligraphy can foster Islamic aesthetic awareness through the understanding that beauty, creativity, patience, and perseverance are part of *ihsan* (good deeds) in honoring revelation. The beauty of writing is positioned not merely as a visual achievement, but as a religious expression born of discipline and sincerity. Furthermore, teaching calligraphy plays a role in the formation of morals by instilling trustworthiness, humility, and brotherhood. The learning process cultivates students' sense of responsibility, humility toward correction, respect for teachers, and growth in an atmosphere of togetherness and mutual support.

From the perspective of Islamic education, theological values are at the core of the process of human formation oriented to monotheism [31]. Al-Ghazali's thought emphasizes that true education aims to inculcate divine consciousness through the integration of intention, charity, and spiritual awareness [32]. This concept is in line with *tazkiyat al-nafs* which places repetitive activities and discipline as a means of purification of the soul. Research Chan & Ananthram (2019) [33] shows that direct and repetitive religious practices have high effectiveness in strengthening the individual's awareness of monotheism, sincerity, and spiritual closeness to revelation as the main source of life value.

According to Manubey & Sitompul [34] in the framework of spiritual pedagogy, activities that combine cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions have been proven to be able to deepen the internalization of religious values. Empirical studies show that learning experiences involving sacred symbols, such as sacred texts, can significantly increase the dimensions of *dzikrullah* and *tadabbur*. In this context, the contemplative learning approach in religious education emphasizes that reflective practices that are carried out slowly and consciously are able to strengthen the emotional and spiritual connection with the object of learning [35], [36].

From an Islamic aesthetic perspective, the concept of *jamal* (beauty) cannot be separated from divine values, because beauty is seen as a manifestation of God's nature [37]. According to Harrison (2023) [38] in the thought of Sayyid Qutb emphasized that art in Islam has a transcendent function, namely connecting human beings with divine values through aesthetic experience. Studies Baydoun et al. (2024) [11] Arabic calligraphy serves as a symbolic medium that brings together the dimensions of aesthetics and spirituality. Therefore, the beauty in calligraphy is not just a visual aspect, but an expression of courtesy that reflects religious awareness and respect for revelation.

According to Doyle [39] Education provides an explanation that value is not transferred directly, but is built through meaningful learning experiences. Value-based creative activities are able to encourage internal reflection and the formation of personal meaning. Creativity in this context is not free, but structured in certain norms and rules, thus resulting in a balance between innovation and adherence to values. In research Abouelela et al. (2025) [14] religious value-based art is able to strengthen spiritual identity while developing students' intellectual capacity.

Furthermore, the formation of morals is the main goal of education in the context of values such as *amanah*, *tawadhu*, and *ukhuwah* formed through social interaction, example, and habituation in the learning environment [40]. In the study Giera (2025) [41] emphasizing that collective and practice-based learning has an important role in building a religious and inclusive social character. Thus, the integration of spiritual, aesthetic, and moral values shows that religious arts-based education has the capacity to form a complete and balanced personality.

### 3.2 Contribution to the Teaching of Arabic Calligraphy Art

The findings of this study reveal that the teaching of Arabic calligraphy plays a role in strengthening spirituality, forming personal morals, fostering learning manners, developing an understanding of Islamic aesthetics, and strengthening socio-religious character, forming individuals who are responsible and caring for others.

Table 3. Research Findings on the Contribution of Arabic Calligraphy

Contribution	Interview Description	Informant
Strengthening spirituality	The practice of writing holy verses fosters an awareness of worship, an inner closeness to the Qur'an, and a more theocentric orientation of life.	DSA, BM, Ary & TE
Pembentukan akhlak personal	Practicing calligraphy can foster discipline, patience, perseverance, and self-control through a learning process that demands continuous precision.	AB, Kr, OJ & DNS
Inculcation of learning manners	The expression of writing the art of calligraphy is able to show the formation of an attitude of respect for the teacher, readiness to accept correction, and humility.	TP, AS & ANA
Development of Islamic aesthetics	The beauty of writing is understood not as a mere visual achievement, but as an expression of courtesy in glorifying revelation.	Asi, ISM, TE & AF
Strengthening	The use of artworks and the collective teaching process as a means of	HM, Ary, &

Contribution	Interview Description	Informant
socio-religious character	da'wah forms ukhuwah, care, and solemn orientation in the lives of students.	AMA
Observation:	The teaching of Arabic calligraphy art serves as an educational practice that integrates the spiritual, moral, Islamic aesthetic, and socio-religious dimensions. The activity of writing holy verses forms awareness of worship, discipline, learning manners, and strengthens ukhuwah and solemn orientation in the lives of students in a sustainable manner.	

The exposure of the table data shows that the teaching of Arabic calligraphy art makes a significant contribution to the formation of the religious character of students comprehensively. The practice of writing holy verses plays a role in strengthening spirituality through increasing awareness of worship, inner closeness to the Qur'an, and a theocentric life orientation. During the training process that requires continuous rigor, personal morals are formed, such as discipline, patience, perseverance, and self-control. This learning also instills manners through the habit of respect for teachers, openness to correction, and humility. In addition, the beauty of writing is understood as an expression of courtesy in glorifying revelation, not just a visual achievement. Furthermore, collective learning and the use of works as a da'wah medium strengthen the socio-religious character, including ukhuwah, care, and solemn orientation in the lives of students. For more details on the model's findings as a whole, the researchers present them in the image below.



Figure 1. Research Findings Based on Theological Values and Contributions

On the other hand, the researcher conducted a document analysis through the LEMKA website at the following link (<https://lemka.ac.id/?m=0>). First, (December 25, 2023). Syaiful Adnan's work represents aesthetic and spiritual firmness through the consistency of a distinctive style rooted in Islamic values. Calligraphy is positioned not just as an artistic expression, but as a manifestation of identity, creative discipline, and a sustained religious commitment to maintaining the authenticity of form and meaning [42].



Figure 2. Khat "Syaifuli" and Syaiful Adnan's Steadfastness

Second, (September 22, 2025). Digital calligraphy workshop activities reflect the integration between traditional art and modern technology as an educational adaptation strategy. This collaboration expands calligraphy expression media, increases relevance for the digital generation, and strengthens the function of calligraphy as an innovative means of da'wah and learning [43].



Figure 3. LEMKA Holds Digital Calligraphy Workshop

Third, (November 9, 2025). The 2025 Santri of the Year award reflects recognition of the consistency of contribution in the development of calligraphy as a medium of da'wah and education. This achievement confirms that the practice of calligraphy is not only aesthetically valuable, but also has a strategic impact in strengthening Islamic religious and cultural identity in a sustainable manner [44].



Figure 4. Director of Lemka Wins 2025 Santri of the Year Award

The formation of religious character depends not only on the normative delivery of values, but on repetitive and contextual direct experience [45]. Study by Reeve & Cheon, showing active involvement in meaningful activities is able to increase the internalization of values more deeply than the lecture method [46]. In the context of Islamic education, practices that combine elements of worship, reflection, and skills have proven effective in forming a spiritual awareness and theocentric orientation of life, so that individuals not only understand values, but also live them in real actions [47].

The arts-based pedagogy approach emphasizes that art has a unique ability to develop the affective and moral dimensions of students [48], [49]. Based on studies Morizio et al, Art-based learning is able to increase empathy, discipline, and emotional engagement, which contributes to the formation of personal morals [50]. In religious contexts, art rooted in the value of revelation has the added advantage of integrating aesthetic experience with spiritual awareness, in which a structured creative process is able to shape character through a combination of technical practice and value reflection [51].

According to Jover & Gozávez Character is formed through social interaction, example, and the culture of the learning environment [52]. Collective learning that involves cooperation, joint evaluation, and habituation of manners is able to strengthen the values of ukhuwah, social responsibility, and devotional orientation. In the study de Carvalho, the integration between the spiritual dimension, personal morals, and social interaction shows that religious arts-based learning not only forms personally pious individuals, but also has social sensitivity and commitment to religious values in social life [53].

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that high school students' scientific literacy in physics, based on the PISA 2025 framework, is still at a moderate to low level, with notable weaknesses in inquiry and data interpretation skills. This study contributes theoretically by providing an updated profile of scientific literacy aligned with the PISA 2025 framework and highlighting ethnosience as a relevant approach to address these gaps. Practically, the findings suggest the need to integrate ethnosience into physics learning to enhance contextual understanding and higher-order thinking skills. At the policy level, the results support the development of curricula that emphasize scientific literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy. Further research should focus on testing ethnosience-based learning models to improve students' scientific literacy competencies.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

WR was responsible for the study design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. W and HS contributed to the conceptual development and critical review of the manuscript.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

## USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the generation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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