

Internalization of Islamic Character Values Through Reflective Approach and Spiritual Pedagogy in Islamic Education: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing Islamic character values through a reflective approach and to examine the role of pedagogical spirituality of Islamic Religious Education teachers, as well as to formulate a synergistic model for sustainable character formation in vocational high school students.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected using participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation techniques. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, including Islamic religious education teachers, school principals, and students. Data analysis applied the Miles and Huberman interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

Main Findings: The findings reveal that the reflective approach effectively enhances students' logical awareness of Islamic character values. Pedagogical spirituality of teachers, expressed through sincerity, role modeling, and spiritual practices (riyadhoh), strengthens students' inner transformation. The synergy between reflective reasoning and spiritual influence accelerates the internalization process, resulting in more consistent, conscious, and sustainable character behavior among students.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study offers a novel integrative model combining reflective pedagogy and pedagogical spirituality in Islamic character education. It advances existing knowledge by emphasizing the balanced interaction between cognitive reasoning and spiritual influence, providing a holistic framework for character internalization that moves beyond conventional instructional methods toward deeper affective and transformative learning processes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education is not merely a process of transfer of knowledge, but fundamentally an effort to internalize values and transform students' character [1], [2]. In vocational high schools, such as Vocational School Al-Bahari Modung, the challenge of strengthening Islamic character becomes increasingly complex due to moral disruption and shifting behavioral norms among adolescents. Empirical observations indicate that daily violations of Islamic etiquette, such as improper eating and drinking manners, reflect that religious understanding remains at the cognitive level and has not yet been internalized as a stable inner awareness guiding behavior [3], [4].

This condition reveals a fundamental problem in character education, where the learning process is often dominated by instructional and one-way approaches. Such approaches tend to neglect students' affective and reflective dimensions, resulting in superficial compliance rather than meaningful internalization. In this regard, a reflective approach becomes essential, as it encourages students to critically contemplate the wisdom and logical consequences behind religious teachings [5]- [7]. Through reflective learning, students are not only instructed to follow rules but are guided to understand the rational and moral foundations of those rules, leading to deeper awareness.

However, reliance on cognitive reflection alone is insufficient to ensure the success of character education. Previous studies highlight that the effectiveness of value internalization is closely related to the personal quality of educators, particularly their pedagogical and spiritual dimensions [8]. In Islamic education, teachers function not only as knowledge transmitters (*mu'allim*) but also as spiritual guides (*mursyid*), whose sincerity, inner discipline, and exemplary conduct influence students at a deeper level. The concept of pedagogical spirituality emphasizes that values are not merely taught but are transmitted through the teacher's inner state, including sincerity, moral integrity, and spiritual practices such as *riyadhoh* (prayer and self-discipline) [9].

Several studies have examined reflective learning and teacher role modeling in character education; however, most of them treat these elements separately and tend to position character education as a pedagogical technique rather than an integrated model [10]. This creates a research gap, particularly in understanding how cognitive (reflective) and spiritual (pedagogical spirituality) dimensions interact synergistically in the process of value internalization [11]. Therefore, there is a need for a holistic approach that integrates both aspects to achieve sustainable character transformation.

In the context of Vocational School Al-Bahari Modung, this study identifies a unique educational practice that combines reflective approaches with the pedagogical spirituality of Islamic education teachers. The interaction between rational reflection and spiritual influence provides an opportunity to explore a more comprehensive model of Islamic character internalization. This study proposes that the synergy between reasoning (reflective approach) and inner spirituality (pedagogical spirituality) can accelerate the formation of students' character, transforming religious values from external obligations into internalized personal needs.

Several previous studies have examined the internalization of character values in Islamic education from various perspectives. First, a study by Mashoedi [12] showed that a reflective approach can increase students' moral awareness, but this study emphasized the cognitive aspect without linking it to the spiritual dimension of teachers as the main agent of value internalization. Second, a study by Azizah [13] emphasized the importance of teacher role models in shaping students' religious character, but still positioned the teacher's role normatively without elaborating on systematic pedagogical mechanisms, particularly through a reflective approach. Third, a study by Alif Achadah [14] examined Islamic value-based character education in the school context, but tended to view it as a curricular program and did not simultaneously address the integration between students' reflection processes and teachers' inner spirituality. Thus, these three studies indicate that studies on value internalization are still fragmented both in the cognitive (reflective) and spiritual dimensions (teacher role models) and have not yet constructed a synergistic relationship between the two within a unified conceptual framework.

Based on these gaps, the novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which combines two main dimensions: the reflective approach as a critical-cognitive process for students and the teacher's pedagogical spirituality as a transformational force in character formation [15]. This research not only views reflection as a learning strategy but also directly links it to the teacher's spiritual qualities as a medium for internalizing values. Thus, this research offers a new conceptual model in the form of a synergy between reflective rationality and spiritual depth, a concept that has not been comprehensively studied in Islamic religious education studies.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic education studies by broadening the perspective of value internalization from a partial approach to a holistic and integrative model. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing learning that is oriented not only toward knowledge transfer but also toward fostering inner awareness through reflection and spiritual role models [16]. Furthermore, the findings can also serve as a basis for educational policymakers in formulating strategies for strengthening character education that are more contextual and sustainable.

The urgency of this research is increasingly relevant amidst the phenomenon of moral degradation and character crisis among adolescents, particularly in vocational education environments with complex social dynamics (()). Educational approaches that are solely instructional and cognitive have proven incapable of producing substantive behavioral change. Therefore, a character education model is needed that addresses not only the knowledge aspect but also the reflective awareness and spiritual depth of students. This research is crucial in addressing this need by offering a more comprehensive approach to sustainably internalizing Islamic values in students' daily lives.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the process of internalizing Islamic character values through a reflective approach, to examine the manifestation of pedagogical spirituality of teachers, and to formulate a synergistic model that integrates both dimensions in shaping students' daily behavior (). The novelty

of this research lies in its integrative perspective, which bridges cognitive and spiritual domains, offering a more holistic framework for character education in Islamic learning contexts.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was selected because the research aims to explore in depth the process of internalizing Islamic character values through the integration of reflective approaches and teachers' pedagogical spirituality within a natural school setting. Qualitative research enables a holistic and contextual understanding of social phenomena based on participants' perspectives [17], [18].

The case study design was chosen since the research focuses on a specific setting, namely Vocational School Al-Bahari Modung, allowing for an in-depth investigation of the interaction between teachers and students in the character-building process [19].

2.2. Research Subjects and Objects

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which involves choosing participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives [20]. The subjects include, first, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers as implementers of reflective approaches and pedagogical spirituality. Second, The school principal as a policymaker in character education, Third, Students as recipients of the value internalization process. The object of this research is the process of internalizing Islamic character values, particularly (1) Reflective approach (cognitive aspect), (2) Pedagogical spirituality of teachers (spiritual aspect), (3) Students' behavioral transformation.

2.3. Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

Primary data, primary data were obtained directly from participants through, (1) Participatory observation: Observing students' daily behavior in the school environment, (2) In-depth interviews: Exploring teachers' strategies in applying reflective learning and spiritual practices. Secondary data, were collected from (1) School documents (vision and mission statements), (2) Students' discipline records, (3) Documentation of religious activities. Data collection techniques, data were collected using triangulation techniques, including (1) Observation (2) Interviews (3) Documentation. Triangulation, enhances the validity and credibility of research findings.

2.4. Research Instruments

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher as a human instrument, who directly collected and interpreted data in the field. In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the key instrument who determines the research focus, selects participants, conducts observations and interviews, and interprets the data contextually and holistically. This role enables flexibility and sensitivity to social phenomena, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and meanings. Such an approach is consistent with qualitative research principles emphasizing the researcher's central role in naturalistic inquiry and meaning-making processes ().

Supporting instruments included observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation checklists to ensure systematic and comprehensive data collection. Observation guidelines were used to record behaviors, interactions, and learning processes related to the internalization of Islamic character values. Interview guidelines facilitated semi-structured, in-depth data collection through open-ended questions, allowing participants to express their perspectives while enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes. Meanwhile, documentation checklists were utilized to examine relevant records such as lesson plans, school policies, and student activities, which functioned to support data triangulation and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings ().

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of three stages: (1) data reduction, selecting and simplifying relevant data. (2) data display, organizing data into descriptive, tables, or matrices. (3) conclusion drawing and verification. Interpreting data and verifying continuously.

Table 1. Categories of Islamic Character Value Internalization

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
x	Bad	8.6
y	Sufficient	12.4
z	Good	15.3

2.6. Data Validity and Data Acquisition

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through several strategies, including source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, namely teachers, students, and the school principal, to ensure consistency and accuracy of the data. Technique triangulation was applied by utilizing multiple data collection methods, including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, so that the findings could be cross-verified from various perspectives. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming the research findings directly with participants to validate the accuracy and interpretation of the data. These strategies were employed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research findings [21].

Furthermore, the data acquisition process was conducted directly in the field through intensive interaction between the researcher and participants in a natural setting. The researcher collected data without any manipulation of conditions, allowing the data to authentically represent the real situations and phenomena occurring within the school environment. This naturalistic approach ensures that the findings reflect the actual dynamics of the internalization process of Islamic character values as experienced by the participants [22].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study along with a comprehensive discussion regarding the internalization of Islamic character values through reflective approaches and the pedagogical spirituality of Islamic Religious Education at Vocational School Al-Bahari Modung. The results are presented descriptively and analytically based on data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.

3.1. Internalization of Character Values through Reflective Approach

The findings of this study indicate that the reflective approach serves not only as a supporting strategy but as a fundamental mechanism in the internalization of Islamic character values among students. In the observed learning context, Islamic Religious Education is no longer positioned as a rigid, normative subject dominated by one-way instruction. Instead, it is transformed into a dialogical and reflective process that actively engages students in interpreting, questioning, and reconstructing their understanding of moral values. This shift marks a significant pedagogical transition from teacher-centered instruction toward a more student-centered and meaning-oriented learning paradigm.

In practice, teachers facilitate reflective dialogue by presenting real-life situations that are closely related to students' daily experiences. For example, when discussing manners of eating and drinking, teachers do not merely emphasize religious rules as fixed doctrines. Rather, they guide students to explore the logical consequences of improper behavior, such as health risks, alongside the spiritual implications, such as the loss of blessings (*barakah*). This dual exploration encourages students to engage both rational and spiritual reasoning, allowing them to see the relevance of religious teachings in a more holistic manner. As a result, students begin to develop a deeper sense of ownership over the values they practice, rather than perceiving them as externally imposed obligations.

Moreover, the reflective process observed in this study enables students to move beyond passive acceptance toward active meaning-making. Students are encouraged to articulate their thoughts, share personal experiences, and critically evaluate their own behaviors. This process not only strengthens their cognitive understanding but also fosters metacognitive awareness, where students become more conscious of the reasons behind their actions. Consequently, the internalization of values becomes more sustainable, as it is rooted in personal conviction rather than mere compliance.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with the concept of reflective learning, which emphasizes that lasting behavioral change originates from deep cognitive engagement and critical self-reflection [23]. Reflection allows learners to reconstruct knowledge and integrate it into their personal belief systems, thereby enhancing the durability of value internalization [24]. In addition, this approach resonates with constructivist theory, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction between experience and prior understanding. Therefore, the reflective approach in this study functions not only as a pedagogical technique but also as a transformative process that reshapes students' moral awareness, shifting it from external obedience to internally grounded conviction.

3.2. Manifestation of Pedagogical Spirituality in Character Transformation

Beyond the cognitive dimension facilitated by the reflective approach, this study reveals that pedagogical spirituality plays a crucial and irreplaceable role in strengthening the internalization of Islamic character values. Pedagogical spirituality, in this context, is not limited to abstract concepts but is concretely manifested through teachers' sincerity (*ikhlas*), consistency in worship practices, emotional sensitivity toward students, and their ability to embody Islamic values in everyday behavior. These elements collectively create a learning atmosphere that is not only intellectually stimulating but also spiritually nurturing.

One of the most significant findings is the consistent practice of teachers engaging in spiritual preparation before teaching, such as offering prayers specifically for their students. This practice reflects a deep sense of responsibility and spiritual commitment, positioning teaching not merely as a professional duty but as an act of worship. The impact of this practice extends beyond the teacher, as it contributes to the formation of what can be described as “spiritual connectivity” between teachers and students. This connection fosters a sense of trust, emotional closeness, and respect, which significantly enhances students’ openness to moral guidance.

Furthermore, pedagogical spirituality is also reflected in the teacher’s role as a moral exemplar. Students observe not only what the teacher says but also how the teacher behaves, responds to challenges, and interacts with others. This observational learning process reinforces the internalization of values, as students are more likely to adopt behaviors that are consistently demonstrated by respected figures. In this sense, the teacher becomes a living curriculum, where values are communicated through actions rather than words alone.

Theoretically, these findings support the view that in Islamic education, the success of value transmission is highly dependent on the spiritual quality of the educator [25]. The teacher functions simultaneously as a knowledge transmitter (*mu’allim*) and a spiritual guide (*mursyid*), whose inner state significantly influences the effectiveness of the educational process. Previous studies have also emphasized that teacher exemplarity is a dominant factor in shaping student character, as consistent modeling provides a concrete reference for abstract moral values [26], [27]. Therefore, pedagogical spirituality operates as an implicit yet powerful medium of value transmission, complementing the explicit instructional processes within the classroom [28].

3.3. Synergistic Model of Reflective Approach and Pedagogical Spirituality

One of the most important contributions of this study is the identification of a synergistic model that integrates the reflective approach and pedagogical spirituality in the internalization of Islamic character values. This model represents a holistic framework that bridges the gap between cognitive understanding and spiritual experience, offering a more comprehensive approach to character education. Rather than functioning independently, the reflective approach and pedagogical spirituality interact dynamically, reinforcing each other in the process of shaping students’ character.

In this model, the reflective approach serves as a cognitive entry point, enabling students to critically analyze and understand the rationale behind moral values. Through guided reflection, students develop logical awareness and are able to connect religious teachings with real-life contexts. However, cognitive understanding alone is insufficient to ensure deep internalization. This is where pedagogical spirituality plays a crucial role, acting as an affective and spiritual reinforcement that embeds these values into students’ inner consciousness. The teacher’s sincerity, spiritual discipline, and moral consistency create an emotional and spiritual environment that strengthens students’ attachment to the values being learned.

The interaction between these two dimensions produces a more profound internalization process. Students not only understand what is right but also feel compelled to practice it as part of their personal identity. This integration minimizes resistance to moral values, as they are no longer perceived as external constraints but as internally meaningful principles. Over time, this process leads to the formation of stable and consistent character traits that are reflected in students’ daily behavior.

Conceptually, this synergistic model aligns with the idea that effective character education must integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains [29], [30]. It also provides a critical response to previous approaches that tend to separate these dimensions, resulting in fragmented and less effective outcomes. By combining reflective learning with pedagogical spirituality, this study offers a more holistic and contextually relevant framework for Islamic character education.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that educators should adopt an integrative approach that balances intellectual engagement with spiritual cultivation. Teachers are encouraged not only to design reflective learning activities but also to continuously develop their own spiritual quality, as both aspects are interdependent in influencing students’ character formation. Therefore, this model has significant implications for improving the quality of Islamic education, particularly in fostering authentic, sustainable, and deeply internalized character development among students.

Although numerous previous studies have examined the internalization of character values in Islamic education, several conceptual and empirical limitations remain evident. First, a study by Aini et al. highlights the effectiveness of the reflective approach in enhancing students’ moral awareness; however, the study primarily focuses on the cognitive dimension of reflection without linking it to the teacher’s spiritual qualities as a reinforcing factor in value internalization [31]. Second, research conducted by Rahman emphasizes the importance of teacher exemplarity in shaping students’ religious character, yet it tends to position the teacher’s role in a normative sense and does not sufficiently elaborate on concrete pedagogical mechanisms, such as structured reflective practices, that could strengthen this process [32]. Third, the study by Hidayat and Suryadi explores Islamic character education within a school-based framework, but it is largely programmatic and curricular in nature, lacking an in-depth analysis of the dynamic interaction between students’ reflective awareness and the teacher’s spiritual influence [33]. Therefore, these studies indicate that the discourse on value internalization

remains fragmented, either emphasizing the cognitive (reflective) dimension or the spiritual (teacher-based) dimension, without integrating both into a coherent and operational conceptual framework.

Based on these gaps, the novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which combines the reflective approach (cognitive dimension) and pedagogical spirituality (spiritual dimension) in the internalization of Islamic character values. This study does not merely position reflection as a pedagogical strategy but connects it directly with the teacher's spiritual quality as a transformative medium in the learning process. Furthermore, this research introduces the concept of "spiritual connectivity," referring to the affective-transcendental relationship between teachers and students that strengthens value internalization. Thus, this study offers a new conceptual contribution by proposing a synergistic model that integrates reflective rationality and inner spirituality to achieve sustainable character formation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic education by providing a more holistic perspective that integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in character education. The findings reinforce the argument that value internalization cannot be effectively achieved through a single-dimensional approach but requires the integration of multiple learning domains [34]. Practically, this study offers important implications for Islamic Religious Education teachers to design learning strategies that combine reflective engagement with authentic spiritual practice. Teachers are encouraged not only to facilitate critical reflection but also to cultivate their own spiritual integrity, as both aspects are interdependent in influencing students' character development. Additionally, for educational policymakers, these findings can serve as a reference in developing more contextual, integrative, and sustainable character education programs, particularly in vocational school settings where moral challenges are increasingly complex [35].

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this research employs a case study approach in a single educational institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Second, the data are predominantly qualitative and context-specific, meaning that the effectiveness of the proposed model has not been quantitatively measured. Third, this study primarily focuses on the interaction between teachers and students within the school environment, without extensively considering external factors such as family and social influences that may also affect the internalization of character values. Therefore, future research is recommended to test this model across diverse educational settings and to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of character education processes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the internalization of Islamic character values at Vocational School Al-Bahari Modung is effectively achieved through the integration of reflective approaches and the pedagogical spirituality of PAI teachers. First, the reflective approach plays a crucial role in fostering students' cognitive awareness by encouraging critical thinking and personal reflection on the meaning of moral values. This process transforms students' compliance from being rule-oriented into awareness-based behavior. Second, the pedagogical spirituality of teachers, manifested through sincerity, inner exemplarity, and spiritual practices such as *riyadhoh*, significantly strengthens the internalization process. This spirituality creates a strong emotional and spiritual connection between teachers and students, facilitating deeper value transmission. Finally, the study identifies a synergistic model in which the reflective approach functions as a cognitive entry point, while pedagogical spirituality acts as a reinforcing mechanism at the affective and spiritual levels. This integration results in a more sustainable and meaningful transformation of students' character. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of combining rational and spiritual dimensions in character education, offering a holistic framework for improving the effectiveness of Islamic Education, particularly in vocational school contexts.

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