

Reinforcing Students' Character through Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah Education: A Study of Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in Medan

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Abstract

This study aims to optimize Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah Education (AIK) in strengthening students' character values at Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan City. AIK education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character in accordance with Islamic values and the Muhammadiyah philosophy, such as integrity, responsibility, independence, and social awareness. This study employs a field research method using a phenomenological approach. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, document analysis, and documentation. The results indicate that the implementation of structured and relevant AIK education can enhance students' understanding of Islamic values and foster positive character traits in their daily lives. Optimizing Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah education as an effort to strengthen the character values of students at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in the city of Medan has been carried out through various integrations of Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah education, including in the curriculum and learning designed through 1) Al-Islam and Muhammadiyah Subjects (Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, Al-Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic History as well as the Struggle of Muhammadiyah), 2) Integration of AIK into General Subjects (Mathematics, Science, and Indonesian Language), and 3) Tahfidzh and Tilawah Learning (programs for memorizing and understanding the Qur'an with memorization targets appropriate for lower and upper grade levels). Furthermore, religious activities at school include: 1) Congregational Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers at school, 2) Morning Quran Recitation (students read the Quran together before starting lessons), 3) Ramadan Intensive Islamic Boarding School (a special program during Ramadan to deepen religious knowledge and character education based on Islam and Muhammadiyah principles), and 4) Commemoration of Major Islamic Holidays (activities for the Prophet's Birthday, Isra' Mi'raj, the Islamic New Year, and Ramadan with various educational activities). Furthermore, the cultivation of Islamic character is achieved through 1) instilling Islamic etiquette in daily life, 2) the 5S Culture to encourage students to behave courteously, respect teachers and peers, and maintain proper conduct in social interactions, and 3) the ISHA Movement (Infaq and Shadaqah) through activities such as Friday Blessings, Class Infaq, and Social Service. Moreover, the methods employed to optimize Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education at the Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan include AIK extracurricular activities such as 1) Tapak Suci, a Muhammadiyah-specific martial art that teaches discipline and resilience, 2) Islamic competitions such as Quran memorization contests, AIK quizzes, calligraphy, and Islamic speeches, 3) Worship Practice, Training, and Cadre Development to foster a spirit of organization from an early age through the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM) at the elementary school level.

Keywords: Education, Islam and Muhammadiyah, Character Values



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1. INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah plays a vital role in the development of Indonesian society. Founded by KH Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah is guided by a vision of progressive renewal (tajdid) that emphasizes the modernization of Islamic thought in response to contemporary challenges. Since its inception, Muhammadiyah has regarded education as a strategic tool for building a progressive Islamic society. Muhammadiyah's Social Enterprises (AUM) have grown rapidly to this day, particularly in the field of education, which encompasses thousands of institutions ranging from elementary schools to universities. Data indicates a significant increase in the number of Muhammadiyah educational institutions from 2010 to the present, affirming Muhammadiyah's position as one of the largest educational organizations in Indonesia.

However, this quantitative growth is accompanied by challenges in improving educational quality. Conceptually, Muhammadiyah education is not only oriented toward the transfer of knowledge but also toward character and values formation. This aligns with the character education theory proposed by Thomas Lickona, which emphasizes that education must develop the aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In this context, Muhammadiyah education has four primary functions, as outlined by Faridi (2010:118): as a means of intellectual development, community service, da'wah (preaching) to promote good and forbid evil, and leadership development. These four functions demonstrate that Muhammadiyah education is holistic, integrative, and oriented toward the formation of individuals of character.

Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) education is both a distinctive feature and the primary foundation of the Muhammadiyah education system. AIK functions not only as a subject but also as a value system that permeates the entire educational process. From an Islamic educational perspective, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas emphasizes that the primary goal of education is the cultivation of *adab*—that is, an awareness of humanity's position as beings endowed with knowledge and morality. Thus, the optimization of AIK is crucial so that Muhammadiyah education can produce individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess moral and spiritual integrity. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah, as a reform movement, continues to innovate in the field of education. Muhammadiyah's educational reforms encompass curriculum development, the modernization of teaching methods, and institutional transformation. Nurkhaliza (2023) states that Muhammadiyah's educational renewal focuses on two main aspects: educational ideals and teaching techniques. The ideals of Islamic education, as explained by Setyawan (2010:111), are to shape individuals of noble character, broad knowledge, and social responsibility. This aligns with the holistic education approach, which emphasizes balance among intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions (Miller, 2019).

In the context of the curriculum, Muhammadiyah education integrates religious studies and general studies as a form of integral education. This approach aligns with the philosophy of Ahmad Dahlan, who rejected the dichotomy between knowledge and emphasized the importance of balance between worldly and spiritual knowledge. Theoretically, this integration is also supported by modern curriculum theory, which emphasizes the importance of coherence among objectives, content, methods, and assessment (Tyler, 1949). An integrated curriculum facilitates more effective internalization of values during the learning process. However, based on interviews with the Muhammadiyah Branch Leadership overseeing elementary schools in Medan, the implementation of AIK education still faces various challenges. The curriculum and syllabus have not yet been fully optimized and tend to prioritize cognitive aspects, while affective aspects and character development remain secondary priorities. This situation contradicts the 21st-century education paradigm, which emphasizes the importance of developing soft skills, character, and social-emotional competencies (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of alignment between learning objectives, content, methods, and assessment indicates weaknesses in instructional design. According to the theory of constructive alignment (Biggs, 2014), the success of learning is largely determined by the alignment between objectives, learning activities, and assessment. This misalignment can result in an ineffective learning process in achieving character education goals (Naimi and Sakinah, 2022).

Another issue identified is the low level of commitment among some teachers to implementing the educational objectives of AIK. In fact, from an Islamic educational perspective, teachers play a strategic role as role models (*uswah hasanah*) in shaping students' character. This aligns with Al-Ghazali's view, which emphasizes that the success of education depends heavily on educators' ability to exemplify the values they teach. On the other hand, external challenges in the form of 21st-century global developments also place pressure on the education system (Sitorus, D. A., & Pasaribu, M., 2026). The Ministry of Education and Culture (2019) identified six major trends, including the digital revolution, globalization, the acceleration of change, and the increasing role of creativity and innovation. In line with this, recent studies indicate that education in the digital age must be able to integrate digital literacy, critical thinking, creativity, and character as core competencies (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019). In this context, the optimization of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan education becomes highly

relevant as a strategy for strengthening students' character. AIK can serve as a foundation of values capable of shielding students from the negative impacts of globalization while equipping them with character traits that are adaptive to change. Thus, the optimization of AIK is not only important within the internal context of Muhammadiyah but also in addressing national educational challenges in the global era. Based on the above discussion, this study focuses on examining how the optimization of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan education can be implemented as an effort to strengthen students' character values at the Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan, as well as how the results of this optimization contribute to shaping students' character grounded in Islamic values.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a field research methodology with a phenomenological approach. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Furthermore, data analysis in this study utilized the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing/verification. This study was conducted among students at Muhammadiyah elementary schools in the city of Medan. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, observations, and the distribution of questionnaires at various Muhammadiyah elementary schools in the city of Medan. Each potential respondent was informed about the participation they would undertake, that this participation was voluntary, and that all their identities would be changed to initials through the informed consent form included in the questionnaire.

3. RESULTS

The Implementation of Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education as an Effort to Strengthen the Character Values of Students at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in Medan

Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools have been one of the Muhammadiyah Social Enterprises (AUM) since their establishment and have rapidly developed into Islamic educational institutions with a primary role in fostering individuals of noble character. Character values are a crucial component to be conveyed to students through Islamic Education and Muhammadiyah Values as an effort to strengthen the character values of students at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in Medan. The values applied as teaching materials in the learning process must be based on the harmonization of teaching materials and the role of educators, as well as the development of teaching materials appropriate to students' experiences. Here, teachers act as moderators and use students' own notes to serve as a bridge to a higher level of understanding. Teachers must not only convey knowledge but also build it in their students' minds. Efforts to internalize these values proceed systematically, including through listening to responses, organization, and character development. The process of Islamic education encompasses many aspects, namely student development, cognitive, empathy, emotional, and overall psychomotor skills within the context of a progressive way of life. (Firmansyah & Wardati, 2022).

The curriculum is the focal point of the revitalization of Muhammadiyah Education, as it serves as the heart of educational reform. Normatively and historically, education in Muhammadiyah is characterized by its religious nature, featuring a curriculum with distinct characteristics: Al Islam and Kemuhammadiyan. These elements are applied in Muhammadiyah schools and managed by respective leaders within the Muhammadiyah organizational structure, from the Central Office down to the Branch level. These schools are part of the social welfare initiatives of Muhammadiyah members. Although technical operations on the ground are delegated to respective leadership, overall oversight is exercised by a Council known as the Muhammadiyah Council for Primary and Secondary Education (Dikdasmen). Education in Muhammadiyah schools is considered complete according to the founding vision of Muhammadiyah: to produce individuals of "integrity" who master religious and general knowledge, the material and spiritual realms, as well as this world and the hereafter.

For K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, holistic character education is an inseparable whole. This is why K.H. Ahmad Dahlan sought to pioneer an integral educational approach to shape the character of an exemplary community. The indicators of an exemplary community (Khoira Ummah), as embodied in Muhammadiyah's educational products, manifest in the aspect of piety, which in

practice shapes personal character, social character, and national character. This serves as evidence that Muhammadiyah's construction of character education was mandated at the National Working Meeting on Muhammadiyah Education, attended by three educational institutions within Muhammadiyah: the Council for Primary and Secondary Education, the Council for Higher Education, and „Aisiyiah. At the National Working Meeting, they formulated the objectives of Muhammadiyah education as follows: to shape Muslim individuals who are faithful, God-fearing, of noble character, competent, self-confident, disciplined, responsible, patriotic, dedicated to advancing and developing knowledge and skills, and committed to working toward the realization of an exemplary, just, and prosperous society that is pleasing to Allah SWT. Based on research conducted at Muhammadiyah schools, it was found that the schools have established Islam and the Muhammadiyah ethos as the foundational pillars in character development, serving as the guiding spirit of all school activities designed as the priority and defining characteristic of Muhammadiyah schools at the elementary level. In this regard, school administrators, teachers, and local Muhammadiyah branch leaders in Medan collaborate to cultivate students' attitudes through the instillation of character values rooted in spiritual cultivation, including faith and piety, trustworthiness, honesty, discipline, obedience to rules, responsibility, perseverance, and a spirit of patriotism. The implementation of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan (AIK) education at the Muhammadiyah elementary school level typically encompasses various aspects integrated into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school culture. The following are some forms of its implementation:

Table 1
Integrating Islamic Education and Muhammadiyah Values in Elementary Schools in Medan as a Strategy to Strengthen Students' Character Values

Curriculum and Instruction	Religious Activities at School	Cultivating Islamic Character	AIK Extracurricular Activities
1. Islamic Studies and Muhammadiyah Studies (Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic History, as well as the History of Muhammadiyah) 2. Integration of AIK into General Subjects (Mathematics, Science, and Indonesian Language) 3. Tahfidzh and Tilawah Instruction (a program for memorizing and understanding the Qur'an, with memorization targets tailored to lower and upper	1. Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers in congregation at school, 2. Morning Quran recitation (students read the Quran together before classes begin), 3. Ramadan Intensive Islamic Boarding School (a special program during Ramadan to deepen religious knowledge and character education based on Islam and the principles of Muhammadiyah), 4. Celebration of Islamic Holidays (activities for the Prophet's Birthday, Isra' Mi'raj, the Islamic New Year,	1. Islamic etiquette in daily life. 2. The 5S Culture to encourage students to behave courteously, respect teachers and peers, and maintain proper etiquette in social interactions, 3. The ISHA Movement (Infaq and Shadaqah) through activities such as Friday Blessings,	1. Tapak Suci, a martial art unique to Muhammadiyah that teaches discipline and resilience. 2. Islamic competitions such as Quran memorization contests, AIK quizzes, calligraphy, and Islamic speech contests. 3. Worship Practices 4. Training and Leadership Development aimed at fostering a spirit of organization from an early age through the Muhammadiyah

grade levels).	and Ramadan, featuring various educational activities).	Class Infaq, and Community Service.	Student Association (IPM) at the elementary school level
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As outlined in the table above, the various forms of integration in the implementation of Islamic and Muhammadiyah education represent efforts undertaken by Muhammadiyah schools in Medan to strengthen the character values of elementary school students at Muhammadiyah schools in the city. These various forms of integration have proven effective in optimizing Islamic and Muhammadiyah education as a means of strengthening the character values of elementary school students at Muhammadiyah schools in Medan.

The Results of Optimizing Islamic Education and Muhammadiyah Values as an Effort to Strengthen the Character Values of Students at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in Medan

Islam and Muhammadiyah values serve as a vital foundation for strengthening character education, while also producing graduates who are highly educated, possess noble character, and have professional expertise. Furthermore, Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan also serve as instruments for creating an environment that enables individuals to grow as human beings who are conscious of the presence of Allah SWT as their Lord and who master knowledge (Kemuhammadiyahan & Muhammadiyah, 2013). The concept of character education at Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan implements the character education concept from the Central Executive Board of Muhammadiyah's Basic Education Council, namely education grounded in pure faith and monotheism, while the objective of instilling character values in students at school is to develop their potential so they become well-rounded individuals with sound intellect and moral character in life, thereby shaping a distinctive student personality rooted in Islamic and Muhammadiyah values.

Character development is carried out through various integrations of Islamic and Muhammadiyah education, including in the curriculum and learning designed through 1) Islamic and Muhammadiyah Subjects (Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic History as well as the Struggle of Muhammadiyah, 2) Integration of Islamic and Muhammadiyah values into General Subjects (Mathematics, Science, and Indonesian Language), and 3) Tahfidzh and Tilawah Learning (programs for memorizing and understanding the Qur'an with memorization targets tailored to lower and upper grade levels). Furthermore, religious activities at school include 1) congregational Dhuha and Zuhr prayers at school, 2) Morning Quran recitation (students read the Quran together before starting lessons), 3) Ramadan Intensive Islamic Boarding School (a special program during Ramadan to deepen religious knowledge and character education based on Islam and Muhammadiyah principles), and 4) Commemoration of Major Islamic Holidays (activities for the Prophet's Birthday, Isra' Mi'raj, the Islamic New Year, and Ramadan featuring various educational activities).

Furthermore, the cultivation of Islamic character is achieved through 1) the practice of Islamic etiquette in daily life, 2) the 5S Culture, which encourages students to behave courteously, respect teachers and peers, and maintain proper etiquette in social interactions, and 3) the ISHA Movement (Infaq and Shadaqah) through activities such as Friday Blessings, Class Infaq, and Community Service. Moreover, the methods employed to optimize Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education at the Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan include AIK extracurricular activities such as 1) Tapak Suci, a Muhammadiyah-specific martial art that teaches discipline and resilience, 2) Islamic competitions such as Quran memorization contests, AIK quizzes, calligraphy, and Islamic speeches, 3) Worship Practice, Training, and Cadre Development to foster a spirit of organization from an early age through the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM) at the elementary school level.

The results of implementing Islamic and Muhammadiyah education as an effort to strengthen the character values of students at Muhammadiyah elementary schools in the city of

Medan have shown positive outcomes for the students and have become ingrained as a distinctive aspect of the school's culture. The diverse range of activities designed are part of this strengthening effort to provide objective experiences and practices in Islamic practice. This is certainly in line with Islamic teachings that religion is not merely studied as knowledge but must be accompanied by practice. The effort to instill the practice of Islam and Muhammadiyah organizational values involves accustoming students to carry out the commands of Allah SWT whether obligatory or recommended within the school environment. This is certainly in line with the vision and mission of Muhammadiyah's charitable endeavors, namely that students possess good character and are able to apply the knowledge they possess. Thus, habit formation is part of the students' training in fulfilling the obligations of a Muslim who has reached puberty to worship in accordance with the true teachings of Islam. The hope is that after students are trained repeatedly, it will become ingrained in them to carry out the commands of Allah SWT within the family and the wider community. In practice, students understand and are able to fulfill their obligations in accordance with Islamic teachings under the guidance of teachers, ensuring that these practices are truly grounded in knowledge and professionalism.

4. DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the implementation of Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education (AIK) at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in Medan has been carried out systematically and integrated into various aspects of education, including the curriculum, religious activities, daily routines, and extracurricular activities. These findings indicate that AIK functions not only as a subject but also as a core value or spirit within all educational activities at Muhammadiyah schools. Theoretically, these findings align with the concept of character education proposed by Thomas Lickona, who states that character education must encompass three main dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The implementation of AIK at the Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan has reflected these three dimensions. The aspect of moral knowing is realized through the teaching of AIK materials such as aqidah, akhlak, fiqh, the Qur'an, and hadith. Meanwhile, moral feeling is developed through the instillation of Islamic values such as etiquette, the 5S culture, as well as infaq and shadaqah activities. Moral action, on the other hand, is reflected in the practice of worship, religious activities, and student involvement in social and organizational activities.

Furthermore, the integration of AIK into the curriculum and teaching demonstrates an effort to bridge the dichotomy between religious studies and general studies. This aligns with the concept of integral education developed by Ahmad Dahlan, which emphasizes the importance of a balance between spiritual and intellectual aspects. The integration of AIK into general subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and Indonesian Language demonstrates that Islamic values are not taught separately but are internalized throughout the entire learning process. From a curriculum perspective, the findings of this study also align with Ralph W. Tyler's curriculum theory, which emphasizes the importance of alignment between objectives, learning experiences, and evaluation. The implementation of AIK at SD Muhammadiyah Kota Medan indicates efforts to align character education goals with learning activities and religious practices. However, the results of previous research in the introduction section indicate that there are still challenges in curriculum synchronization, particularly in the affective aspect. Therefore, the ongoing integration needs to be continuously strengthened to make it more systematic and measurable.

Furthermore, the cultivation of Islamic character through school culture such as daily etiquette, the 5S culture, and ISHA activities (infaq and shadaqah) demonstrates that character education is not limited to formal instruction but also occurs through the hidden curriculum. In educational studies, the hidden curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping students' character through the school environment and culture. This aligns with the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara, who emphasized that education takes place not only in the classroom but also through exemplary behavior and the cultivation of habits in daily life. Religious activities such as congregational prayer, morning Quran recitation, Ramadan intensive boarding school programs, and celebrations of major Islamic holidays also make a significant contribution to the formation of students' religious

character. These activities serve as a medium for the internalization of values through direct experience (experiential learning), so that students not only understand religious teachings theoretically but also practice them in daily life. This reinforces the finding that experience-based learning is more effective in shaping character than a purely cognitive approach.

AIK's extracurricular activities such as Tapak Suci, Islamic competitions, religious practice, and leadership training through the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM)—demonstrate that character education is also fostered through non-academic approaches. These activities play a role in shaping the values of discipline, responsibility, leadership, and a spirit of togetherness. Thus, character education at SD Muhammadiyah Kota Medan does not only focus on religious aspects but also encompasses the development of social and national character. The research results also indicate that the implementation of AIK has a positive impact on students' character development, such as increased religious attitudes, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social awareness. These values are part of the school's distinctive culture and set Muhammadiyah schools apart from other educational institutions. This demonstrates that AIK functions as a strategic instrument in building students' identity and character.

However, the success of AIK implementation is greatly influenced by the role of teachers as role models (*uswah hasanah*). Teachers serve not only as learning facilitators but also as models for internalizing character values. Therefore, teachers' commitment and professionalism are key factors in the success of AIK education. Without exemplary behavior, the process of internalizing values will be difficult to achieve optimally. Overall, the results of this study confirm that the optimization of Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan Education at SD Muhammadiyah Kota Medan has made a tangible contribution to strengthening students' character values. Integrated implementation through the curriculum, habit formation, religious activities, and extracurricular programs demonstrates that AIK-based character education can serve as an effective and relevant educational model in addressing educational challenges in the modern era. Thus, AIK functions not merely as a subject but as a value system that holistically shapes students' personalities.

5. CONCLUSION

Efforts to optimize Islamic and Muhammadiyah education as a means of strengthening the character values of students at Muhammadiyah Elementary Schools in the city of Medan have been implemented through various integrations of Islamic and Muhammadiyah education, including in the curriculum and instruction designed through 1) Islamic and Muhammadiyah Subjects (Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, Al-Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic History as well as the Struggle of Muhammadiyah), 2) Integration of AIK into General Subjects (Mathematics, Science, and Indonesian Language), and 3) Tahfidzh and Tilawah Instruction (programs for memorizing and understanding the Qur'an with memorization targets tailored to lower and upper grade levels). Furthermore, religious activities at school include: 1) Congregational Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers at school, 2) Morning Quran Recitation (students read the Quran together before starting lessons), 3) Ramadan Intensive Islamic Boarding School (a special program during Ramadan to deepen religious knowledge and character education based on Islam and Muhammadiyah principles), and 4) Commemoration of Major Islamic Holidays (activities for the Prophet's Birthday, Isra' Mi'raj, the Islamic New Year, and Ramadan with various educational activities). Furthermore, the cultivation of Islamic character is achieved through 1) instilling Islamic etiquette in daily life, 2) the 5S Culture to encourage students to behave courteously, respect teachers and peers, and maintain proper conduct in social interactions, and 3) the ISHA Movement (Infaq and Shadaqah) through activities such as Friday Blessings, Class Infaq, and Social Service. Moreover, the methods employed to optimize Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education at the Muhammadiyah Elementary School in Medan include AIK extracurricular activities such as 1) Tapak Suci, a Muhammadiyah-specific martial art that teaches discipline and resilience, 2) Islamic competitions such as Quran memorization contests, AIK quizzes, calligraphy, and Islamic speeches, 3) Worship Practice, Training, and Cadre Development to foster a spirit of organization from an early age through the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM) at the elementary school level.

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