

Formation of Islamic Character in Students Through a Cultural Approach at SDN Sarude, Sarjo District, Pasangkayu Regency

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Received: 13-02-2026

Revised: 23-04-2026

Accepted: 17-05-2026

KEYWORDS

Islamic character education;
Local culture;
Islamic religious education.

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the development of Islamic character in students through a culture-based approach at SDN Sarude, Pasangkayu Regency, Indonesia, in response to the need for a contextual character education model amidst the challenges of globalization. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, interviews with the principal, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, classroom teachers, and students, and documentation of school activities. Data analysis was conducted thematically through reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the formation of Islamic character takes place in an integrative manner through four main strategies: (1) integration of local Mandar cultural values (sipakatau, sipakalebbi, sipakaingge) in Islamic Religious Education learning, (2) habituation of religious activities as a school culture, (3) teacher role models as moral models in daily practice, and (4) school-community synergy in a socio-religious environment. These four strategies contribute to strengthening the internalization of moral values, religious discipline, social empathy, and student responsibility in a contextual and sustainable manner. These findings align with international discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy, values-based education, and teacher role models in character education, which emphasize the importance of cultural context, habituation of moral practices, and consistency of educator role models. The study's primary contribution lies in providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian elementary school context that the synergy of cultural and religious identities within a single educational ecosystem enhances the meaningfulness of character value internalization. This research recommends the development of an Islamic character education model that is adaptive to local contexts and its replicability testing through comparative and longitudinal studies.

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Introduction

Islamic character education is the main orientation in Islamic religious education in elementary schools because it is the main foundation for the formation of students' personalities from an early age through the holistic internalization of religious values. (Hermawan, 2020) Islamic

character encompasses noble moral values such as honesty, which encourages students to speak the truth and act fairly in social interactions; discipline, which instills regularity in worship and obedience to rules; responsibility, which builds awareness of one's own and others' obligations; etiquette toward teachers, which reflects respect and courtesy in learning; and social awareness, which fosters empathy and mutual cooperation.(Faizah, 2022)This approach not only improves students' moral ethics but also prevents deviant behavior such as bullying through habituation strategies, teacher role models, and integration of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum.

In the context of Indonesia, which is rich in cultural diversity, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) character education cannot be separated from local wisdom such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), siri' (honor and self-respect), and warani (harmonious togetherness), which are natural means to instill noble morals in a contextual and relevant way to students' daily lives. The synergy between Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, and social awareness with local traditions creates a down-to-earth education, where students learn to integrate religious teachings through cultural practices, thereby strengthening their identity while preserving ancestral heritage from the threats of globalization.(Khojir et al., 2025)This integrated approach, through a community project-based curriculum, daily practices, and school-community collaboration at the elementary school level, not only enhances students' moral understanding but also prevents cultural erosion by building holistic and inclusive character resilience.

Sarude Elementary School, located in Sarjo District, Pasangkayu Regency, has quite diverse socio-cultural characteristics. The community consists of several ethnicities, such as Mandar, Bugis, Kaili, and Javanese, each with its own unique cultural value system. This diversity presents both a challenge and an opportunity in building student character through a cultural approach aligned with Islamic values. Therefore, this research is important to uncover how Islamic character formation is carried out through a cultural approach at Sarude Elementary School.

Islamic character

Islamic character refers to the traits, nature, morals, and behavior that stem from the values of Islamic teachings, as enshrined in the Quran and Hadith, and reflected in noble moral behavior as a concrete manifestation of a Muslim's piety. This character is not born suddenly, but rather develops through a long process of habituation, strengthening of faith, and consistent education in various aspects of life.(Samsudin et al., 2024). Instilling Islamic character requires an integration between belief in the heart, verbal expression, and realization in daily actions, thus producing a personality that is religious, responsible, behaves politely, cares for others, upholds justice, and rejects all forms of violence and discrimination.(Rustandi et al., 2025).

Islamic character building is seen as the primary foundation for developing a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also morally and spiritually mature. Education enables students to emulate the morals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), known for his four main qualities: shiddiq (honesty), tabligh (conveying the truth), amanah (trustworthiness), and fathonah (intelligence and wisdom).(Cape, 2025)These four traits serve as moral standards that guide students to consistently maintain integrity, openness, responsibility, and the ability to think critically and wisely in various situations. Thus, Islamic character not only fosters a harmonious relationship between humans and God but also strengthens social relationships, creating a peaceful atmosphere, mutual respect, and a foundation of universal human values.

Islamic character building emphasizes strengthening fundamental values that align with the principles of good morals, as explained in the previous paragraph. These values include religiosity, reflected in consistent adherence to religious teachings, tolerance in the face of diversity, independence fostered through a strong work ethic, and a spirit of inclusive, discriminatory mutual cooperation.(Marhaini, 2024). All these values serve as a support for moral habits that direct

students to practice faith not only in rituals, but also in social interactions and community responsibilities.(Hermawan, 2020).

The process of internalizing these values takes place through education that touches on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, so that students are able to understand, feel, and practice Islamic teachings in their entirety.(Arisinah et al., 2025) (Oktaviana, 2023)The principles exemplified in Luqman's advice about the importance of monotheism, respect for parents, commitment to worship, and the development of noble morals become the pedagogical foundation for building a person with high morals.(Arisinah et al., 2025)This advice not only guides students to be pious and have good character, but also provides direction for them to be able to make wise moral decisions in their daily lives.

Thus, Islamic character education essentially aims not only to shape obedient and polite individuals but also to produce a generation capable of contributing to civilization. They are expected to emerge as individuals with integrity, respect for others, capable of collaboration, and embodying Islamic values as a blessing for the universe in a broader social context. The integration of these values enables students not only to have a strong relationship with Allah SWT but also to become members of society with noble character and culture, ready to face the dynamics of modern life wisely.

Culture in the context of Education and Islam

In the context of Islamic education, culture is understood not only as a traditional heritage inherent in a society, but also as an identity that shapes ways of thinking, behaving, and acting. In the world of education, culture holds a strategic position because it can enrich the learning process by integrating local values into the curriculum and learning practices.(Susanti et al., 2024)When Islamic education adopts positive local cultural elements, learning becomes more relevant to the realities of students' lives, easier to understand, and can increase student motivation and engagement in learning activities. Thus, culture serves as a bridge connecting normative Islamic teachings with the context of students' daily lives, so that religious values are not only taught but also lived out in social practices.(Susandi et al., 2025).

Islamic education essentially aims to shape morals, attitudes, and behavior that bring us closer to Allah SWT. However, the quality of this education can be improved if the learning process aligns with the local culture.(Pratiwi et al., 2025)In practice, cultural integration can be carried out through various approaches, for example through educational institution leadership that understands local cultural characteristics and is able to translate them into the school's vision and policies.(Sumarni et al., 2024). Furthermore, a conducive organizational climate rooted in local culture can create a harmonious, inclusive learning environment that reflects welcoming Islamic values.

Training and professional development of educators also has an important role in strengthening cultural integration in Islamic education.(Sitanggang, 2025)Teachers who understand local culture will find it easier to convey material using a contextual approach, so that religious values can be understood more deeply and practiced in community life.(Azzahra et al., 2025)By utilizing cultural wisdom, the educational process will be more lively and will touch the emotional and social aspects of students.

Ultimately, cultural integration in Islamic education not only improves the quality of learning but also strengthens the bonds of civility between schools and the community. This process fosters harmony, a sense of belonging, and dynamic tolerance among people. Local values aligned with Islamic principles can serve as a strong foundation for developing a generation that is not only

spiritually and intellectually intelligent but also wise in understanding cultural diversity as a blessing and part of the richness of civilization.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining a deep and comprehensive understanding of the process of Islamic character formation in students at SDN Sarude. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, process, and experiences of research subjects naturally, within the school's social and cultural context. Through a qualitative approach, researchers can describe the phenomenon of Islamic character education as it occurs in everyday learning practices without manipulating the research variables.(Rukminingsih et al., 2020).

Data collection techniques in this research include observation, interviews, and documentation as an effort to obtain a comprehensive picture of the object being studied.(Marka, nd). Observations were conducted directly by observing the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning process in the classroom, as well as various cultural and religious activities that take place in the school environment, such as routine religious activities, the habituation of religious attitudes, and social interactions between students. Through these observation activities, researchers were able to clearly identify student behavior in daily life, interaction patterns between teachers and students, and the dynamics of learning that occur in the classroom. In addition, observations also provided a concrete picture of how Islamic character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and mutual respect are applied and habituated in various school activities. The data obtained from these observations then became an important basis in analyzing the role of PAI learning in the formation of students' Islamic character.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, class teachers, and several students. The interviews aimed to gather information regarding school policies, learning strategies, teachers' roles, and students' experiences and understanding of the process of Islamic character formation through a cultural approach. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing informants to express their views and experiences more freely and in-depth.(Hasibuan, 2024).

In addition, documentation was used as a supporting data source, including photographs of religious and cultural activities, student discipline records, and school program documents related to character development. This documentation data served to strengthen and verify the findings from observations and interviews.(Rukminingsih et al., 2020).

The data obtained in this study were analyzed through several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation, so that only data relevant to the research objectives was retained. This process aims to facilitate researchers in grouping important information related to the formation of Islamic character through a cultural approach in schools. Next, the reduced data is presented in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative, so that the relationships between data categories, themes, and research findings can be more clearly understood. The final stage in data analysis is conclusion drawing, namely the process of formulating the meaning, patterns, and trends that emerge from the entire research data to comprehensively answer the research problem formulation.

Furthermore, the sampling procedure in this study was conducted using purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of research subjects based on certain considerations relevant to the research objectives. The research subjects included the principal, Islamic Religious Education teachers, several class teachers, and students directly involved in Islamic Religious Education learning activities and cultural and religious activities at SDN Sarude. The selection of informants was based on their role and involvement in the process of forming Islamic character through a cultural approach in the school environment, so that the data obtained is expected to be more in-depth and representative.

The research instruments used were observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation sheets. The observation guidelines were used to systematically observe student behavior, teacher-student interactions, and the implementation of cultural and religious activities at the school. The interview guidelines were structured as open-ended questions to elicit more in-depth information from informants regarding the planning, implementation, and impact of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning and the cultural approach to developing students' Islamic character. Meanwhile, documentation sheets were used to collect supporting data in the form of school documents, such as the school's vision and mission, religious activity programs, regulations, activity schedules, activity photos, and other archives relevant to the research focus.

Result

Integration of Cultural Values in the Formation of Islamic Character

The integration of cultural values into Islamic character formation at SDN Sarude is carried out consciously and continuously by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and class teachers through learning processes both inside and outside the classroom. Local Mandar cultural values are utilized as both a medium and a pedagogical approach to make Islamic teachings easier for students to understand and internalize. (Rahman, 2020) One of the values instilled is sipakatau, a humane attitude, integrated into the morals of others. Through this value, students are guided to treat others with empathy, justice, and compassion, as Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of respecting human dignity. (Umam & Husain, 2024).

In addition, the value of sipakalebbi, or mutual respect, is used to strengthen students' attitudes toward teachers and parents. In learning practices, teachers instill politeness in speech, adherence to advice, and ethical behavior in interactions. This value aligns with Islamic teachings on birrul walidain and respect for educators as inheritors of knowledge. (Amalia et al., 2024) By linking Mandar cultural values with Islamic teachings, students more easily understand that respect and politeness are not merely school requirements, but rather part of their religious obligations and cultural identity.

Another Mandar cultural value, sipakaingge, or mutual reminder, is implemented in various activities that encourage students to advise one another on good deeds. Teachers encourage students to remind each other about discipline, religious observance, and commendable behavior, both in class and at school. This value aligns with the Islamic principle of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, which teaches social responsibility in preserving the common good.

These three Mandar cultural values strongly align with Islamic values such as ukhuwah (brotherhood), ta'awun (mutual assistance), and amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil). This alignment makes Islamic Religious Education learning more contextual and meaningful, as students not only learn Islamic teachings theoretically but also relate them to the culture they are familiar with in their daily lives. Thus, the integration of local cultural values has proven to be an effective strategy in shaping students' Islamic character holistically and sustainably.

Habituation of Religious Activities

Routine school activities at SDN Sarude are designed not only to support learning but also as a strategic tool for developing students' Islamic character. The habit of reciting prayers before and after learning, for example, is instilled to foster a spiritual awareness

that every learning activity is an act of worship and requires the help of Allah SWT. Through this habit, students are guided to always begin and end activities with an attitude of trust and gratitude.

Furthermore, the weekly Dhuha prayer serves as a means of fostering disciplined worship and togetherness. Quran recitation is also a common practice to foster students' love for the Quran, while simultaneously honing their reading skills and understanding its values. Through these activities, the religious atmosphere within the school environment is strengthened and positively influences students' attitudes and behavior in their daily lives.(Dzikro, 2025).

Socio-religious activities such as congregational Friday prayers and regular charity programs play a strategic role in instilling the values of social awareness, empathy, and a spirit of sharing with others. Through direct involvement in these activities, students are not only trained to carry out their religious obligations but also develop sensitivity to the social conditions around them, such as caring for those in need, a spirit of mutual assistance, and a sense of responsibility as part of a community.(Fauzan, 2025)In this context, students are encouraged to understand that Islamic teachings are not solely oriented towards individual worship, but also emphasize the importance of harmonious social relationships, solidarity, and concern for the welfare of others as a concrete manifestation of Islamic values.

Meanwhile, the commemoration of Islamic holidays, packaged through various cultural activities such as Islamic arts performances, religious competitions, local traditions with religious values, and school community activities, provides a more contextual and meaningful learning experience for students. Through this approach, students not only acquire cognitive knowledge about the meaning of Islamic holidays but also experience firsthand how Islamic values are embodied in traditions and cultural expressions close to their daily lives. These learning experiences help students develop a deeper understanding, foster pride in their Islamic identity and local culture, and strengthen the internalization of Islamic character values in real-life practices.

Overall, this habituation approach through routine school activities is an effective means of reinforcing religious values and consistently developing positive behaviors. These habits gradually foster a sense of discipline, responsibility, caring, and religious awareness that are deeply ingrained in students, so that Islamic character is not only conceptually understood but also manifested in practical practice.

Teacher Exemplary Behavior as Character Strengthening

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, along with all educators at SDN Sarude, play a crucial role as role models in shaping students' Islamic character. In their daily lives at school, teachers serve not only as transmitters of subject matter but also as role models whose behavior and attitudes are observed and imitated by students.(Ariyani & Mutia, 2024)Therefore, educators strive to demonstrate politeness, discipline, responsibility, and commitment to religious observance as part of the concrete practice of Islamic values.

This is reinforced by an interview with a teacher who stated that students tend to imitate behavior they observe more readily than simply listening to verbal advice or direction. This statement demonstrates the teacher's awareness of the importance of consistency between words and actions in the character education process. When teachers exemplify worship, interact politely, and comply with school rules, students are naturally encouraged to emulate these behaviors in their daily lives.

Thus, teacher role models are a dominant factor in the successful formation of Islamic character at SDN Sarude. Consistently demonstrated role models create an educational environment imbued with religious and moral values, enabling the internalization of Islamic character to occur naturally and sustainably. Through concrete examples from educators, Islamic values are not only taught theoretically but also embodied in concrete practices, shaping the students' holistic personalities.

Supportive Social Environment

The Sarude community, which still strongly upholds cultural and religious values, provides significant support for the process of developing students' Islamic character. The community's social life, imbued with religious practices, creates a conducive environment for the internalization of Islamic values, both inside and outside of school. This ensures that what is taught in school does not conflict with the realities of students' daily lives, but rather reinforces and sustains them.

Religious traditions such as the commemoration of the Prophet's Birthday, Yasin (the recitation of the Quran), and regular village religious studies (Quran studies) serve as effective social learning tools for students. Through involvement in these activities, children become accustomed to observing and experiencing firsthand Islamic practices in community life, such as togetherness, mutual respect, and the spirit of mutual cooperation. These experiences indirectly shape their religious awareness and strengthen their Islamic identity.

Through synergy between schools and the community, an Islamic learning environment can be more fully realized. The values instilled by teachers in schools are reinforced by real-life practices in the community, so that Islamic character formation takes place not only in the classroom but also in students' social lives. The support of the Sarude community is a crucial factor in creating an educational environment that aligns cultural values, religiosity, and moral development.

The integration of Mandar cultural values such as sipakatau, sipakalebbi, and sipakaingge in Islamic character formation at SDN Sarude has a strong theoretical foundation from the perspective of character education based on local wisdom and social constructivism. Cultural values serve as a pedagogical bridge that connects Islamic teachings with socio-cultural experiences familiar to students, so that the process of internalizing values takes place more contextually and meaningfully. This approach aligns with the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of cultural relevance in value learning. These findings align with international research showing that character education that integrates local values increases student engagement and strengthens the formation of prosocial attitudes, including respect, empathy, and moral responsibility.

The habituation of religious activities in schools such as communal prayer, Dhuha prayer, Quranic recitation, charity, and the commemoration of Islamic holidays based on arts and culture can be explained through the theory of moral habituation and the concept of the hidden curriculum, where religious values are instilled through repeated practices within the school culture. This routine consistently forms students' religious discipline, self-control, and social awareness, because values are not only taught cognitively but are lived out in everyday experiences. In line with the findings of international research on values-based education, the integration of moral values into school culture has proven to be more effective in shaping character than merely normative teaching, because it provides participatory, contextual, and meaningful learning experiences for students.

The exemplary behavior of teachers and the support of the Sarude community's social environment strengthen the internalization of Islamic character through social learning mechanisms and developmental ecology. Teachers act as moral models whose actual behavior serves as the primary reference for students, while the consistency of values between the school and the community creates a harmony of norms that prevents value conflicts within children. These findings align with international research on teacher modeling and school-community partnerships, which confirms that teacher exemplary behavior and social environmental support are key factors in the success of character education.(BABATUNDE et al., 2025). Thus, Islamic character formation at SDN Sarude can be understood as an integrative character education model that combines local culture, religious habits, teacher role models, and school-community synergy within a sustainable educational ecosystem.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that Islamic character formation at SDN Sarude takes place through a holistic and contextual approach, integrating local Mandar cultural values, familiarizing oneself with religious activities, teacher role models, and support from the community. These results confirm that Islamic character education cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which students grow and develop.

The integration of Mandar cultural values such as sipakatau, sipakalebbi, and sipakaingge has proven effective in strengthening the internalization of Islamic values in students. This discussion demonstrated that using local culture as a pedagogical approach makes Islamic teachings easier to understand and internalize because they align with students' daily experiences. The sipakatau value, which emphasizes mutual respect for others, not only enriches moral education but also strengthens students' understanding of the concept of humanity in Islam. This aligns with the view that character education will be more meaningful when linked to local wisdom that is deeply rooted in society.

The values of sipakalebbi and sipakaingge also contribute significantly to shaping students' manners and social responsibility. Discussion of the research findings shows that students more readily accept the value of respect for teachers and parents when these values are understood as part of their cultural identity as well as a religious command. Similarly, the implementation of sipakaingge in school activities reinforces the practice of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar in a simple and practical way among students, so that they become accustomed to advising one another on good deeds without coercion.

In addition to cultural integration, the habituation of religious activities in schools is a crucial factor in sustainably strengthening Islamic character. Discussions revealed that routines such as reciting prayers, Dhuha prayer, Quranic recitation, and socio-religious activities not only foster disciplined worship but also foster spiritual awareness and social awareness. These habits serve as a process of internalizing values, where students gradually develop religious habits that impact their daily behavior. Thus, Islamic character is not limited to the cognitive realm but is manifested in concrete attitudes and actions.

Teacher role models emerged as the most dominant finding in the research discussion. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and classroom teachers were seen as central figures who serve as direct role models for students. The discussion revealed that consistency between teachers' words and actions significantly impacts the success of character education. Students tend to emulate the religious behavior, discipline, and politeness displayed by teachers in their daily

lives. This finding reinforces the view that role models are the most effective method in Islamic character education, as religious values are conveyed through concrete examples, not simply verbal advice.

Furthermore, the religious social environment of the Sarude community, which still strongly upholds local cultural values, also strengthens the process of developing students' Islamic character. Discussions demonstrated a harmonious synergy between the school and the community, ensuring that the values taught in school do not conflict with the students' social realities. Children's involvement in community religious activities such as the Prophet's Birthday, Yasinan (the recitation of the Yasin), and village religious study groups provides hands-on experience that enriches the learning process at school. This creates continuity between formal education and socio-religious education in the community.

Overall, the discussion results confirmed that Islamic character formation at SDN Sarude was successful because it was supported by local cultural integration, religious habits, teacher role models, and a conducive social environment. These four factors complement each other and form a comprehensive, contextual, and sustainable character education system. These findings reinforce the idea that Islamic education rooted in local culture and supported by a religious social ecosystem has great potential to optimally shape students' Islamic character.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that effective Islamic character formation occurs through an integrative approach that links local wisdom, familiarization with religious practices, educator role models, and support from the social ecosystem. The integration of Mandar cultural values (sipakatau, sipakalebbi, sipakaingge) serves as a pedagogical medium that mediates the contextual internalization of Islamic values, strengthens the relevance of learning, and enhances the meaningfulness of students' learning experiences. These results expand the conceptual framework of character education by demonstrating that the synergy of cultural and religious identities is not merely compatible but mutually reinforcing in shaping moral dispositions, religious discipline, social empathy, and responsibility.

Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening the ecosystem-based character education model by emphasizing the role of the hidden curriculum (school culture and valued routines), moral modeling (teacher role models), and school-community value coherence as key determinants of successful character internalization. These findings enrich the literature on character education and Islamic education with empirical evidence that contextual-cultural and practice-based value learning has a stronger internalization potential than a purely normative-instructional approach.

Practically, the implications of this research encourage the design of culturally sensitive character education policies and programs, integrating religious practices into school culture, and strengthening school-community partnerships. Methodologically, these results suggest the importance of developing character assessment instruments that assess the transformation of attitudes and social practices, not just cognitive outcomes. Further research is recommended, including comparative studies across cultural contexts and longitudinal designs, to test the sustainability of this integrative model's impact on student character development.

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