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**Article**

# Implementation of Character Education Based on Akhlakul Karimah through Science Learning at Ma'arif 5 Junior High School in Ponorogo

Rivo Adi Prasetyo[1]*, Nala Zakia Alfara Dysa[2], Arsita Ayundia Kholilul Rahma[3], Dian Ernasari[4], Faninda Novika Pertiwi[5]

[1,2,3,5] Universitas Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo, Indonesia
[4] SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo, Indonesia

** Corresponding Address: rivoadiprasetyo77@gmail.com*

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**ABSTRACT**

Amidst the rapid development of science and technology, education is required not only to produce intellectually intelligent students, but also those with strong character and noble morals. This study aims to describe the implementation of character education based on akhlakul karimah (good morals) in science learning at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo. The approach used is qualitative with a case study type because it focuses on the process and meaning of applying moral and religious values in science learning activities. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that science teachers integrate akhlakul karimah values through the habit of religious attitudes, discipline, responsibility, and gratitude for the creations of Allah SWT, which strengthen the spiritual and social character of students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in human resource development, encompassing the entire process of transferring knowledge, skills, and values (Puspitasari & Sri, 2024). In the Indonesian context, the current challenges in education are not only focused on improving academic achievement, but also on building strong character and moral integrity, in accordance with the mandate of the constitution (Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Education, Article 3). Contemporary social phenomena such as high rates of bullying, declining public ethics, and rampant dishonesty among teenagers indicate a dissonance between intellectual intelligence and emotional-spiritual maturity (Hudi, 2024). Failure to instill noble values has the potential to produce a generation that is cognitively intelligent but lacks ethics and social awareness (Nugroho et al, 2023).

Therefore, character-based education has become a crucial issue that demands a paradigm shift, namely the harmonious integration of cognitive learning content with a

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systematic process of affective behavior habituation (Ramadhani & Eka, 2024). This emphasis is increasingly relevant for Islamic-based educational institutions, such as SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo. This school believes that a solid character foundation must be rooted in religious values, which are specifically manifested through the cultivation of akhlakul karimah (noble morals and ethics) (Zahra & Imam, 2023). Akhlakul karimah is used as the main foundation that encompasses morals, ethics, and spirituality, to ensure that students not only master knowledge ('ilm) but also have noble manners (adab). This study aims to examine in depth how this concept is implemented in the curriculum, school activities, and daily habits, as well as how this implementation functions as the main parameter in shaping the character of students.

Although the urgency of character education is recognized nationally, the implementation of moral values often faces significant challenges at the school operational level. Externally, students are exposed to unfiltered digital information, where cases of moral decadence in cyberspace, such as bullying and disrespect towards educators, show that cognitive intelligence is not directly proportional to ethical intelligence (Aksenta et al, 2023). Internally, SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo, which is based on Islamic values, is also not immune to this threat. Initial data shows that, even though the school has a regular religious program (such as Dhuha and Dzuhur prayers in congregation), some indications of deviant behavior among students (Source: School Discipline Report for Month X), such as indiscipline in attendance and a lack of manners when interacting outside of class hours, are still found. The gap between the school's ideal of producing graduates with good character and the reality of their daily behavior is the main problem underlying this study. Therefore, this study aims to identify in depth the implementation of the akhlakul karimah program (as a key parameter) and how structured programs, such as the teacher role model program and the integration of values in general subjects, are truly effective as a main foundation in minimizing such negative behavior.

In response to moral gaps and contemporary ethical challenges, this study offers a solution in the form of strengthening holistic character education by making akhlakul karimah (good character) the main foundation. The concept of akhlakul karimah was chosen as the solution framework because of its comprehensive nature, covering both horizontal and vertical ethical dimensions. This approach overcomes the limitations of conventional character education models, which often focus only on the cognitive realm. Based on the Three Pillars framework for character education implementation (Mustofa, 2023). An effective approach must be integrated into: (1) Curriculum Integration (incorporating moral values into all subjects), (2) Habituation at School (habituation through routine activities), and (3) Educator Role Modeling (modeling).

These three pillars, if applied consistently, can transform knowledge into concrete action. Therefore, this study argues that instilling good character at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo, through examining the implementation of these three pillars, is a valid solution for developing students who are not only intelligent ('ilm) but also have noble morals (adab). The core problem in this study lies in the observed behavioral discrepancy between the school's identity as an Islamic institution that upholds good character and the findings in the field regarding the students' suboptimal discipline and manners. Faced with this challenge, we argue that the solution lies in focusing on good character through a structured and integrated approach. Philosophically, this emphasis on akhlak is a necessity in Islamic education (HR. Ahmad). This solution model has a strong empirical foundation: a holistic approach that includes curriculum integration, habit formation, and role modeling (Mustofa, 2023). It can be precisely applied to revitalize existing programs. This research does not merely document practices but seeks synergistic models capable of bridging the gap between knowledge and implementation, so that the foundation of good character truly manifests in the students' personalities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Character education is understood as a conscious and planned effort to shape the potential of students so that they have moral values, attitudes, and behaviors that are beneficial to themselves and their social environment. In contemporary practice, character education is no longer seen as a separate subject, but as a function of the education system that must be integrated into the curriculum, learning practices, school management, and co-curricular activities. Studies in the Indonesian context emphasize that character programs need to be designed contextually (linking national values such as Pancasila) and operationalized through reflective and collaborative learning models so that values can be absorbed at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels (Sarkadi et al, 2022).

In the context of Islamic education, the concept of akhlaq/akhlaqul karimah (noble morals) becomes the normative and operational framework for character education. Akhlakul karimah emphasizes not only religious rituals but also social ethics such as honesty, discipline, respect, and caring, which should be internalized through learning, role modeling, and habituation. Research on akhlakul karimah teaching strategies shows two main pedagogical approaches: explicit approaches (e.g., teaching norms, exercises, competitions, habituation) and implicit approaches (e.g., school culture, teaching style, teacher role modeling), both of which complement each other in shaping students' character. The implementation of a role model-based model based on the example of the Prophet is also a practical reference in many contemporary madrasas and Islamic schools (Rahman, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, modern literature combines three central theories: habit formation theory, Bandura's social learning theory (modeling), and Lickona's character education framework (connecting knowledge, affection, and behavior). The combination of these three approaches is often summarized in practice as "curriculum integration + habit formation + role modeling." Reviews and case studies show that repeated habit formation (school routines), real-life examples from educators, and reinforcement of values through contextual activities (e.g., entrepreneurship activities, group work) work together to produce stable behavioral change. However, the literature also emphasizes the need to improve teacher competence so that role modeling is consistent and meaningful in the eyes of students (Komalasari, 2023).

Empirical evidence from case studies in Indonesian schools confirms the effectiveness of a combination of habit formation and role modeling when implemented consistently. For example, field observation programs, regular hygiene activities, habit formation of prayer/faith at school, and teacher role modeling programs have been found to help develop students' attitudes of care and responsibility. However, the results also consistently show that success depends on supporting factors such as parental involvement, school management support, and consistency of implementation; without these, interventions tend to have only a temporary impact. The literature also highlights that successful akhlakul karimah teaching strategies combine direct interventions (exemplary, habituation, training) and indirect interventions (school culture management, sanctions when necessary) (Judijanto, 2025).

On the other hand, the digital age presents new challenges for character education. Intensive exposure to social media, cyberbullying, and unfiltered content can undermine behavioral norms if students are not equipped with digital literacy and media ethics. Contemporary research in Indonesia and internationally shows a correlation between unguided social media use and an increase in incidents of online bullying and a decrease in empathy; therefore, today's character education must include components of digital ethics and strategies for preventing mis-/disinformation in order to be relevant to the context of students' lives today (Indainanto & Arief, 2024).

Based on the above literature review, it can be concluded that theoretical foundations and empirical evidence support a holistic approach to making akhlaqul karimah the foundation of

character education in Islamic schools: curriculum integration, structured habituation, and teacher role modeling must be implemented simultaneously and supported by family involvement and adaptation to digital challenges. However, there are gaps in the research, especially in case studies of small/remote schools, which require detailed documentation on how these programs are adapted locally (cultural context and limited resources). This gap is the focus of the case study at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo (Kuswanto, 2023).

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, as it aims to examine in depth the concept of akhlakul karimah (good character) integrated into the curriculum, learning activities, especially science subjects, and everyday school culture. This approach allows researchers to understand the meaning, value, and strategies of teachers in integrating moral and religious aspects into science learning. According to Creswell & Poth, a qualitative approach is relevant for exploring complex phenomena related to behavior, values, and social interactions (Creswell & J. David, 2028). A case study design was chosen because the research focused on a single educational institution with specific characteristics, namely an Islamic school that emphasizes the value of akhlakul karimah. Case studies are effective for understanding a phenomenon in a real-life context (Wohlin, 2021), which is in line with the objectives of this study.

The research location was SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo, an Islamic junior high school that uses akhlakul karimah as the main foundation of character education. The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, which is selecting informants who are considered to have in-depth information related to the implementation of character education (Sugiyono, 2020). The subjects consisted of the principal and science teachers. The selection of subjects was carried out so that the data obtained reflected various perspectives, both from the school management and the teaching staff. To support data collection, interview guidelines, observation sheets, and field notes were used.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was used to record routine activities such as congregational prayers, tahfid (recitation and memorization), and teacher-student interactions in and outside the classroom. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and students to explore their views on the strategies, challenges, and impacts of implementing akhlakul karimah. The interviews were semi-structured so that the researchers could adjust the questions to the situation. Documentation in the form of school rules, habit-forming programs, and teacher modules was used as additional data to reinforce the findings.

The data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages: (1) data reduction, which involves filtering important and relevant information; (2) data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or thematic matrices; and (3) drawing conclusions and conducting continuous verification throughout the research process (Lasaiba & Djamila, 2024). With this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of akhlakul karimah-based character education practices and their contribution to shaping a generation with noble character.

## RESULT

This study aims to describe the implementation of character education based on akhlakul karimah at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo with a focus on three main pillars, namely the integration of values in the curriculum, habituation in school culture, and teacher role models. Data were obtained through direct observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and students using a pre-designed interview guide. The results of the study show that

this school has consistently and continuously implemented character education in various aspects of learning activities and school life (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017).

**1. Integration of Akhlakul Karimah Values in the Curriculum**

Based on an interview with science teacher Ms. Dian, character education is considered the main foundation that must be formed in every student from an early age. She emphasized that children are the "foundation of the nation," so character is the most basic aspect that must be instilled before knowledge. In her view, character education is not merely a complement to learning, but is the core of the entire educational process that determines the direction of a child's future life.

In science lessons, Ms. Dian emphasizes the importance of attitude, manners of speaking, and responsibility as key values to be instilled in students. She explains that science lessons not only teach cognitive aspects, but also build spirituality and empathy through appreciation of the greatness of God's creation. She says, "Every science lesson must be accompanied by character building, namely through exemplary behavior, daily gratitude to God Almighty, and also socialization (empathy) between peers and teachers."

In addition, teachers serve as role models in demonstrating commendable behavior and attitudes both inside and outside the classroom. In this context, Ms. Dian explained that science teachers must appear as firm and responsible figures, not harsh in a negative sense, but consistent and disciplined in enforcing rules. The integration of good character values is also reflected in the design of learning and attitude assessment, where teachers always assess student behavior in terms of responsibility, politeness, and honesty as part of learning success.

**2. Habits in School Culture**

The second pillar in the implementation of character education at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo is the habit of practicing good character values in school life. Based on the results of observations and interviews, the school has various habit-forming programs that are carried out regularly, both daily and weekly, including:

1) Shake hands with teachers when arriving at and leaving school, as a form of politeness and respect.
2) Pray Dhuha in congregation every morning, to build spiritual discipline and a habit of gratitude.
3) Take turns memorizing (tahfidz) the Qur'an in class.
4) Performing the Dhuhr prayer in congregation, as a form of regular mandatory worship.
5) Istighosah every Friday morning, as a form of spiritual guidance and togetherness.
6) Yasinan every Saturday morning, to strengthen literacy and love for the Qur'an.
7) Clean Friday program, to foster a sense of responsibility and care for the school environment.

From the observations, these activities were carried out with discipline. Teachers supervised and guided students directly to ensure they carried out the activities earnestly. Through these habits, students learned discipline, respect for teachers, cooperation, and social responsibility. Religious activities such as Dhuha prayers, istighosah, and Yasinan also strengthen the spiritual and emotional dimensions of students, shaping humble, trusting, and caring characters.

**3. Teacher Role Models and Mentoring Strategies**

In addition to habit formation, teachers play an important role as uswah hasanah or role models for students. Ms. Dian explained that teachers must be real examples in their speech,

dress, behavior, and in carrying out their responsibilities. She emphasized, “Teachers are also role models and examples of good character. Teachers are examples or role models for students. Science teachers themselves reflect the character of being firm, meaning that they are steadfast and responsible for what they have done.”

Teachers not only teach moral values theoretically, but also demonstrate them in real life. This exemplary behavior is the most effective medium in character education. In fostering discipline, science teachers who are also ninth grade homeroom teachers have strategies for dealing with students who break the rules. He explained, "If a student breaks the rules, I first approach them by asking why they did it. After that, there are sanctions accompanied by a written statement. If that is not enough, then the parents are called in for joint guidance."

The approach used is humanistic and reflective, not directly punitive, but rather encouraging students to understand their mistakes. This approach has been proven to build students' moral awareness and sense of responsibility for their actions.

**4. Summary of Science Teacher Interview Results**

To clarify the findings of the interview regarding views and practices of character education at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo, the following is a summary of the interview with Ms. Dian (science teacher and homeroom teacher for ninth grade).

**Table 1.** Interview Summary

| Aspects Studied | Interview Findings | Quotes from Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Views on Character Education | Character education is a fundamental foundation that must be established early on because children are the foundation of the nation. | “In my opinion, character education is the foundation that must be built within every child, because it is character that will carry them through life.” |
| Values Instilled in Science Education | Attitude, manners of speech, and responsibility are key values in learning. | “The characteristics instilled by science teachers are attitude, manners of speaking, and responsibility.” |
| Integrating Values into Learning | Every science lesson is accompanied by the cultivation of exemplary attitudes, gratitude, and empathy. | “Every science lesson must be accompanied by character building, gratitude to God, and empathy towards friends and teachers.” |
| The Role of Teachers as Role Models (Uswah Hasanah) | Teachers set an example of disciplined behavior and moral responsibility. | “Teachers are role models of good character, strict but in a firm and responsible way.” |
| Daily Habits at School | Duha prayer, memorization, Zuhr prayer, greeting, istighosah, and Yasinan. | “Daily practice through the Dhuha prayer, memorization, the Zuhr prayer, and greeting teachers.” |
| Strategies for Handling Student Misconduct | A dialogic approach and a written statement prior to summoning the parents. | “If a student breaks the rules, I approach them first with questions, then give them a written warning. If that's not enough, I call their parents.” |
| Development of Student Morality | There has been progress in student behavior and discipline. | “Alhamdulillah, there has been progress and a change in the child's rhythm of life for the better.” |
| Implementation Challenges | Minimal, but parents are less active in supporting moral habits at home. | “The challenge lies in parents who are difficult to communicate with, even though moral education must also be carried out at home.” |

### 5. Challenges in Development and Implementation

The results of the study show an increase in positive behavior among students after the implementation of the akhlakul karimah program. Ms. Dian acknowledged, "Through the cultivation of good character in this school, there has been progress, as seen from the different backgrounds of each child. Alhamdulillah, there has been development, and their rhythm of life has changed for the better." However, there are still challenges in its implementation, especially from external factors, such as the lack of parental involvement. Teachers believe that the success of character education does not only depend on the school, but also on the synergy between home and school. He said, "The challenge lies in the parents of each child, who are difficult to communicate with the school. Because character building must also be practiced at home." Thus, although the implementation of akhlakul karimah has shown positive results, strengthening communication between the school and families still needs to be improved so that the practice of character values can be sustained in all environments of the children (Suyanto, 2018).

## DISCUSSION

This discussion is a reflection and interpretation of the results of research conducted at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo regarding the implementation of character education based on akhlakul karimah in science learning. Based on the results of the study, character education is considered the main foundation in shaping students' personalities. This is in line with Lickona's (1991) view that character education is the core of moral education, in which schools play an important role in shaping students who have values of responsibility, respect, and care for others. In the context of Islamic education, akhlakul karimah is the main value that guides students' behavior to have a balance between spiritual, social, and intellectual intelligence. This view is in line with Marzuki (2019), who emphasizes that the formation of akhlakul karimah must begin with habit formation and role modeling, not just theoretical teaching. Therefore, character education implemented at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo does not only focus on cognitive aspects but also on moral and spiritual development through routine religious activities and the exemplary attitudes of teachers (Lickona, 1991).

The integration of character values in science education is one of the practical applications of akhlakul karimah education. Science teacher Ms. Dian said that science education in this school emphasizes not only knowledge but also students' attitudes and behavior. In every learning process, teachers relate science material to the greatness of Allah SWT's creation to foster gratitude and awe for His power. This is in line with Muslich's (2018) opinion that science learning should be able to instill spiritual and moral values so that science is not separated from religious values. Thus, science learning at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo has become a means of internalizing religious values, responsibility, and honesty. In addition, Samani and Hariyanto (2017) add that character education through science learning can foster scientific attitudes based on ethical values, such as being thorough, disciplined, and respecting the opinions of others. This view is in line with learning practices in schools that instill scientific attitudes as part of character (Musclich, 2018).

The religious habit formation program implemented by schools is an important pillar in shaping students' good character. Activities such as Dhuha prayer, istighosah, Yasinan, memorizing the Qur'an, and congregational Zuhr prayer are not just routines, but a means of instilling religious values, discipline, and social responsibility. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2017) emphasizes that character education (PPK) can be strengthened through daily habits and routine activities that reflect key values such as religiousness, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. Observations show that these activities are carried out consistently and involve the entire school community. Students not only learn

cognitively, but also experience moral values directly through action. Thus, the habits cultivated by the school become a vehicle for continuous character building that fosters good habits and a sense of togetherness among students and teachers.

In addition to habituation, teachers also serve as role models or uswah hasanah in the process of shaping students' character. Teachers' exemplary behavior is an important aspect that influences student behavior. Ms. Dian explained that teachers must be figures that students can emulate in terms of discipline, responsibility, and politeness. This view is supported by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which states that individuals learn through observation and imitation of the behavior of others who are considered influential. In the context of Islamic education, the Prophet Muhammad SAW is also used as the main role model as stated in QS. Al-Ahzab verse 21, "Indeed, there has been in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example for you." Thus, the exemplary nature of teachers not only functions as a formal educational instrument but also becomes part of the spiritual process in the formation of akhlakul karimah. Naim (2017) emphasizes that an inspiring teacher is one who is able to instill values through concrete actions and a strong personality. Therefore, the behavior of teachers at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo, which is firm yet responsible, has become a true reflection of character education based on exemplary behavior (Rahmawati, 2022).

Furthermore, the results of the study show that the strategy for handling student violations in this school is carried out through a dialogical and reflective approach. The science teacher, as the homeroom teacher for grade IX, prioritizes communication and a personal approach to students before imposing sanctions. This strategy reflects the application of humanistic and educational character education. Rahmawati (2022) explains that the humanistic approach in character education focuses on fostering self-awareness and empathy in students through open dialogue between teachers and students. Teachers do not immediately punish students but give them the opportunity to understand their mistakes and correct their behavior. If the violations continue, the teachers involve the parents to create synergy between the school and the family. Suyanto (2018) states that the success of character education is not only determined by the school but also by the consistency of education at home and the support of the social environment. This shows that SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo has implemented a collaborative and sustainable character education strategy between the school, teachers, students, and parents.

Based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of character education based on akhlakul karimah at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo has been effective through three main approaches: habituation, integration of values in learning, and teacher role modeling. Regular religious programs not only form positive habits but also strengthen students' spiritual values. In addition, the integration of character values in science learning provides an understanding that science must be accompanied by morality and faith. Consistent teacher role modeling is also an important factor in fostering akhlakul karimah behavior in students. Despite challenges in communicating with parents, the school continues to show positive progress in the moral development of its students. The results of this study reinforce Lickona's (1991) theory that character education is effective when instilled through a combination of habit formation, value learning, and real role modeling in school life.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of character education based on akhlakul karimah at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo has been effective through three main pillars, namely the integration of values into the curriculum, habituation in school culture, and teacher role modeling. Science learning has become an important medium for instilling religious and moral values through fostering gratitude for Allah SWT's creations. Science teachers not only teach scientific concepts, but also instill values of responsibility, discipline, and empathy as part of the learning process. Religious programs such as congregational prayers, yasinan,

memorization of the Qur'an, istighosah, and Friday cleaning activities also strengthen the spiritual and social character building of students. Teachers also serve as moral role models for students through their consistent behavior, speech, and discipline, providing students with real-life examples of how to behave in accordance with akhlakul karimah values.

The integration of moral values in science education provides a new understanding that science cannot be separated from moral and spiritual dimensions. The exemplary behavior of teachers and the humanistic approach applied in student development make character education more meaningful and contextual. Thus, education at SMP Ma'arif 5 Ponorogo not only produces students who are academically intelligent, but also have religious personalities and noble character, in accordance with national education goals and Islamic values.

This study contributes theoretically and practically to the development of an Islamic values-based character education model in secondary schools. The findings indicate that science education can be a vehicle for religious character building through the integration of akhlakul karimah values. However, this study is still limited to the context of one school and the perspective of teachers, so further research is recommended to involve students and parents in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the continuity of character education in the home and community environments.

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