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Internalization Of Character Values:Comparative Case Study Of Ethics Guidance Patterns In Public High Schools And Madrasahs

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and compare the internalization patterns of character values in ethical development between Senior High Schools (SMU) and Islamic Senior High Schools (MA). Using a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design, the study was conducted in two representative secondary education institutions: one public SMU and one public MA. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Data analysis refers to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that: (1) Senior High Schools internalize character values through a structural-pedagogical approach based on the Independent Curriculum and the Character Education Strengthening (PPK) program, with an emphasis on Pancasila values, nationalism, and social responsibility; (2) Madrasahs internalize character values through a holistic-integrative approach based on Islamic values, including teacher role models, the habituation of religious rituals, and moral development sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith; (3) there are significant differences in the epistemological dimensions of high schools based on universal-national values, while Madrasahs are rooted in transcendental-theological values; (4) both have points of convergence in the values of honesty, discipline, and responsibility. These findings have important implications for the development of an integrated ethical development model in Indonesian secondary education institutions.

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Keywords: internalization of character values; ethical development; general high schools; Islamic high schools; Islamic religious education

INTRODUCTION

The moral crisis among Indonesia's younger generation is a growing concern amidst the rapid flow of globalization and the penetration of digital culture. Data from *the Indonesian Child Protection Commission* (KPAI, 2023) recorded an increase in cases of ethical violations in schools, including bullying , academic dishonesty, and a decline in respect for educators. This situation underscores the urgency of systematic and sustainable strengthening of character education in secondary education.

The Indonesian government has responded to this challenge through various strategic regulations, including Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education (PPK) and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends heavily on the institutional context of each educational unit (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022).

In Indonesia's secondary education landscape, there are two main types of institutions with distinct characteristics and value bases: Senior High Schools (SMU) under the coordination of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, and Madrasah Aliyah (MA) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These differences in institutional orientation logically give rise to different approaches to internalizing character values. SMUs tend to adopt a more universal and nationalistic approach, while Madrasahs integrate Islamic values comprehensively across all dimensions of their education (Muhaimin, 2021).

Internalizing character values is a more complex process than simply transmitting moral knowledge. According to Lickona (2013), effective character education must address three simultaneous dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The internalization process occurs when external values are successfully absorbed and authentically become part of an individual's belief system, attitudes, and behavior (Hakam, 2016).

Comparative studies on ethical development patterns between high schools and Islamic schools are still relatively limited in Indonesian academic literature. Most previous research focuses on one type of institution without conducting systematic comparative analysis. Research by Biantoro and Rahmatullah (2025) examined the internalization of Islamic Religious Education values in public schools, while Al-Anshori, Suharto, and Ilyasin (2022) examined the internalization

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of religious moderation values in state Islamic senior high schools. However, studies that explicitly compare the two systems in a qualitative and in-depth manner are still rare.

This academic gap prompted this research to explore: What are the patterns of internalization of character values in ethical development in high schools? What are the similar patterns in Islamic schools? And what are the fundamental similarities and differences between the two? The answers to these questions are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of character education in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL STUDY

The Concept of Internalizing Character Values

Internalization of values in the context of education refers to a transformative process in which external values, whether derived from social norms, religious teachings, or educational policies, are deeply absorbed by students until they become an integral part of their personality structure. This process is qualitatively different from superficial socialization, which only results in behavioral conformity without authentic inner understanding (Hakam, 2016).

Thomas Lickona (2013) laid the theoretical foundation for character education through the conception of three interrelated character components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The first component encompasses moral awareness, knowledge of moral values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge. The second component encompasses conscience, self-esteem, empathy, loving kindness, self-control, and humility . The third component, the ultimate goal of character education, is the manifestation of the two previous components in consistent, concrete actions.

From an Islamic perspective, internalizing character values is synonymous with the process of developing noble *character* derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Al-Attas (1991) emphasized that the fundamental goal of Islamic education is *ta'dib* , the placement of humans in their proper positions according to their natural disposition and potential. This concept goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge (*ta'lim*) and encompasses the formation of ethos and character as a whole.

Muhaimin (2021) identified three pathways for internalizing Islamic values in education: first, the curricular pathway through Islamic Religious Education and Character Education; second, the co-curricular pathway through extracurricular religious activities; and third, the school culture pathway through creating a conducive religious atmosphere. These three pathways operate synergistically in shaping students' character.

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Ethical Development Patterns in Secondary Educational Institutions

Ethics development in secondary education institutions operates through a multidimensional mechanism encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Positive discipline as an ethics development strategy has proven effective in fostering independence, responsibility, and religious character in students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022). Within the context of the Independent Curriculum, ethics development is integrated into the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which encompasses six dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, critical thinking, creativity, and independence.

In Islamic educational institutions, ethical development has unique characteristics that cannot be separated from its theological context. Research by Rohili et al. (2024) shows that the implementation of Islamic boarding school-based character education in Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah) results in a more holistic development pattern, where spiritual, intellectual, and socio-emotional dimensions are developed simultaneously. Teacher exemplary behavior (uswah hasanah) is the primary instrument for ethical development in Islamic schools, as emphasized by Suryana and Lestari (2021) who stated that teacher exemplary behavior in internalizing Islamic values in secondary schools has a significant influence on student character formation.

Comparative Framework of Senior High Schools and Madrasahs

The comparison between high schools and Islamic schools in the context of character education requires an analytical framework that considers the differences in their philosophical and epistemological foundations. High schools, as general educational institutions, operate within a pluralistic national educational framework that accommodates the diversity of student backgrounds. The value orientations developed refer to the values of Pancasila as a national consensus.

In contrast, Islamic schools—particularly State Islamic Senior High Schools (MAN)—carry a dual mission: developing academic competencies equivalent to high school while simultaneously deepening Islamic knowledge. MAN Salatiga, for example, develops character development through various integrative religious activities such as congregational Dhuha prayer, Quranic recitation, and internalizing the culture of greetings that reflect Islamic values of courtesy (J-CEKI, 2025). This dual mission creates a more intensive development environment but is also more specific in its value orientation.

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RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design and Approach

This research uses a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the consideration that the phenomenon of character value internalization is a complex, contextual social process that cannot be reduced to mere statistics. As Creswell (2015) notes, a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meanings participants construct from their experiences in real-life contexts.

A comparative case study design was chosen because it allows for in-depth analysis of two contextually distinct units of analysis—a high school and a madrasah—while also allowing for systematic comparison between them. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), comparative case studies are particularly appropriate when researchers intend to understand patterns, differences, and similarities between phenomena in different contexts.

2. Research Location and Participants

The research was conducted in two secondary education institutions: (1) State Senior High School [X] as a representation of public schools; and (2) State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) [Y] as a representation of Islamic education institutions. The selection of these two institutions used a purposive sampling technique with the following considerations: both are A-accredited state schools, located in the same city so that socio-geographical context variables can be controlled, and have a documented track record of character development.

The research participants consisted of: school/madrasah principals (2 people), deputy principals for student affairs (2 people), Islamic Religious Education/Aqidah Akhlak teachers (4 people), homeroom teachers (4 people), religious extracurricular instructors (4 people), and 11th grade students who were selected purposively to represent diverse backgrounds and involvement in the character development program (12 people). The total number of participants was 28 people.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using three complementary techniques (technique triangulation):

a. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with all participants were conducted individually, lasting 45–90 minutes per session, and were recorded with the participants' consent.
b. Participatory observation was conducted for four weeks in each school, covering classroom learning activities, daily habituation activities, morning ceremonies/roll calls, extracurricular religious activities, and social interactions in the school environment.

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c. Documentation study of curriculum documents, student work programs, disciplinary guidelines, character development activity reports, and student portfolio documents.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which consists of four stages: (1) data collection; (2) data condensation which includes selection, focusing, simplification, and transformation of raw data; (3) data display in the form of comparative matrices and descriptive narratives; and (4) drawing and verifying conclusions.

Data validity is guaranteed through four criteria: (1) credibility, through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checking, and extended participation; (2) transferability, through thick description; (3) dependability, through audit trail; and (4) confirmability, through researcher reflexivity.

D. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Internalization Patterns of Character Values in High School

Research findings at high schools show that internalization of character values is carried out through three main mechanisms that operate in an integrative manner.

a. Structural-Curricular Mechanisms

High schools internalize character values through a systematic curricular pathway based on the Independent Curriculum. The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) program serves as the primary vehicle through which students not only learn values cognitively but also experience them through real-life, problem-based projects and community collaboration. As stated by the Deputy Head of Curriculum at the high school studied: "Through P5, our students not only learn about mutual cooperation, but they actually work on social projects that require cooperation. That's where character is formed."

Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in high schools serve as subjects that lay the moral and spiritual foundation for students. Nugroho and Citra (2024) demonstrated that instilling character values through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at Muhammadiyah High Schools positively impacts students' social behavior. However, the intensity and depth of this guidance tend to be more limited than in Madrasahs because it is not integrated across all subjects.

b. Mechanisms of Habituation and School Culture

The high school builds a school culture conducive to the internalization of values through consistent practices: a Monday flag ceremony as a means of reinforcing national values and

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patriotism, a morning literacy program, and an honesty cafeteria. The school culture at the high school emphasizes universal values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility , and interfaith tolerance, in line with the diverse backgrounds of its students.

c. Guidance and Counseling Mechanism

High schools have a structured Guidance and Counseling (BK) system that serves as a tool for developing individual ethics. BK teachers act as facilitators, helping students identify value conflicts, develop emotional intelligence, and formulate responsible moral decisions. This approach reflects a psychological-humanistic orientation that emphasizes individual autonomy in the character-building process.

2. Internalization Patterns of Character Values in Madrasas

a. Exemplary Behavior Mechanism (Uswah Hasanah)

Madrasahs (Islamic schools) prioritize teacher role models as the most fundamental instrument for developing ethics. Unlike high schools, which rely on structural-procedural mechanisms, madrasahs foster a moral climate through personal relationships between teachers and students, manifesting Islamic values in daily interactions. Suryana and Lestari (2021) assert that teacher role models in Islamic-based secondary schools have a moral contagion effect that cannot be replicated through verbal instruction alone.

All teachers at the Madrasah, not just Islamic Religious Education (PAI), are required to be role models in politeness, honesty, and piety. This creates a consistent moral environment that surrounds students throughout the day. A teacher of Aqidah Akhlak (Islamic character) at a MAN studied stated: "Here, character is not a subject, but an atmosphere. When teachers enter the classroom, it's already a moral lesson for the students."

b. Mechanism of Habituation of Religious Rituals

Madrasahs internalize character values through consistent and structured religious rituals. As identified in research at MAN Salatiga (J-CEKI, 2025), these practices include: congregational Dhuha prayer (formation of values of submission and spiritual discipline), morning Quran recitation (internalization of values of patience and love of knowledge), recitation of Asmuul Husna (instilling values of monotheism and divine awareness), and congregational Dhuhur prayer (strengthening values of solidarity and togetherness). These practices operate at the affective and psychomotor levels, going beyond mere cognitive knowledge.

c. Value Integration Mechanism in All Subjects

Madrasas implement the principle of cross-curricular integration of Islamic values. Islamic character values are instilled not only in religious subjects but also in science, mathematics,

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language arts, and social studies. This paradigm is rooted in Al-Attas' concept of the Islamization of knowledge, which eliminates the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge. Irodati (2023) demonstrated that the internalization of character values at MAN Kebumen reached a significant level in the affective-behavioral dimension when Islamic values were comprehensively integrated.

d. Moral Community-Based Development Mechanism

Madrasahs build moral communities that support the internalization process through various programs: mentoring between seniors and juniors, yellow book studies for final year students, memorization groups, and intra-Madrasah student organizations (OSIM) based on Islamic values. The development of Al-Hidayah Ibun Madrasah in developing ethical communication between students and teachers (Ta'dib, 2024) shows that the moral community approach in Madrasahs has succeeded in creating social norms that strengthen the collective internalization of values.

3. Comparative Analysis: Differences and Similarities

Based on the findings in both institutions, this study identified a number of significant points of difference and similarity, as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Internalization Patterns of Character Values in High Schools and Madrasas

Dimensions	High School	Islamic Senior High School
Value Foundation	Universal-nationality (Pancasila)	Transcendental-theological (Quran & Hadith)
Main Mechanism	Structural-pedagogical (P5, PPK)	Holistic-integrative (exemplary behavior, ritual habituation)
The Role of Teachers	Facilitator & general character model	Moral role model (uswah hasanah) and spiritual mentor
Internalization Scope	Focused on class hours & structured programs	Throughout school hours (total environment)
Epistemological Orientation	Pluralist-inclusive	Integrative-Islamic

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Convergence Point	Honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance	Honesty, discipline, responsibility, tolerance

Source: Primary data, processed by researchers (2025)

The most fundamental difference between high schools and Islamic schools lies in the epistemological dimension of ethical development. High schools build ethics on a foundation of universal values that are consensual and interfaith, making character development relatively religiously neutral. Madrasas, on the other hand, position Islamic values as the primary source and ethical reference system, a condition that allows for deeper internalization but is also more exclusive in its orientation.

The second difference lies in the intensity and scope of guidance. Madrasahs create a total environment where internalization of values occurs throughout the day through various rituals, social interactions, and the school's physical-symbolic culture. High schools, despite having structured guidance programs, tend to limit internalization of values to more defined, formal spaces.

The similarities between the two lie in the core values they develop: honesty, discipline, responsibility, and tolerance. This convergence reflects the existence of a universal moral minimum recognized by both educational systems, both Pancasila-based and Islamic. This aligns with Lickona's (2013) argument that there are universal values that transcend differences in religious and cultural traditions.

4. Discussion: Implications of Findings for the Development of Character Education

The findings of this study have several important implications. First, the comparative advantage of Madrasahs in terms of the intensity of ethical development through ritual and exemplary practices needs to be academically recognized, not as the superiority of one system over another, but as a pedagogical treasure that can enrich each other.

Second, high schools excel in inclusivity and accessibility of character development for students from diverse backgrounds. The P5 program within the Independent Curriculum offers a broader space for inter-diverse dialogue, a crucial dimension in Indonesia's diverse context.

Third, the risk of "ritualization without internalization" needs to be addressed in both types of institutions. In Madrasahs, there is the potential for ritual practice to become a mechanical routine without being accompanied by authentic understanding—a paradox also identified in studies of religious traditions (Bandura, 1986; Lickona, 1991). In high schools, the opposite risk is that character programs become administrative formalities without addressing the affective

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dimensions of students.

Fourth, these findings suggest the possibility of a synthetic model of ethical development that integrates the strengths of both systems: the depth of spirituality and powerful role models of Madrasah, combined with the inclusiveness and dialogical approach of SMU. Such an integrative model has the potential to produce graduates who not only possess strong religious character but are also able to contribute to a pluralistic society.

E. CONCLUSION

This qualitative comparative study yields three main conclusions. First, high schools and Islamic schools implement fundamentally different patterns of character value internalization in terms of epistemological dimensions and primary mechanisms. High schools utilize a universal structural-pedagogical approach, while Islamic schools utilize a transcendental holistic-integrative approach. However, both achieve convergence on core values: honesty, discipline, responsibility, and tolerance.

Second, Madrasahs excel in the intensity and comprehensiveness of ethical development through the creation of a total values environment, comprehensive teacher role models, and the integration of ritual practices into the rhythm of school life. Meanwhile, high schools excel in inclusivity, pedagogical pluralism, and a structured curricular framework through P5 in the Independent Curriculum.

Third, developing a more effective ethical development model requires constructive dialogue between the two systems to find a synthesis that leverages each system's strengths. In Indonesia's pluralistic context, the ability to integrate deep religious values with openness to diversity is the most urgent pedagogical competency to develop.

This study is limited to two schools in one city. Further research is recommended to expand the geographic scope, increase the number of cases, and integrate parent and alumni perspectives to gain a more comprehensive picture of the long-term effectiveness of ethics coaching in both types of institutions.

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