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Analysis of the Islamic Character of Religious Studies in Higher Education: A systematic literature review

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Abstract

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Keywords: Islamic character, religion courses, Systematic Literature Review, curriculum The role of higher education is very strategic in shaping the character of students. Religious courses in higher education are expected to contribute significantly to the development of students' Islamic character, especially amidst the challenges of globalisation and secularisation. However, the implementation of Islamic values in the curriculum is still debatable. For this reason, this article aims to analyse the implementation of Islamic character in religion courses in higher education, identify support hinder, provide elements that and and recommendations for more effective curriculum development. The method used in this research is Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) approach. The data collection process was carried out through searching for relevant articles from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to select eligible articles, resulting in 25 articles being analysed. The results of the analysis showed that religion courses have incorporated some elements of Islamic character, such as honesty, responsibility, and social care. However, there are some challenges in its implementation, such as the lack of training for lecturers, teaching materials that are not in accordance with the context, and low student motivation. This analysis concludes that strengthening Islamic character in religion courses in higher education requires a more holistic and integrated approach. Recommendations for curriculum development include lecturer training, development of contextualised teaching modules, and increased interaction between students and the community. The implications of this research are important to improve the quality of higher education in producing generations with Islamic character.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic character is one of the main focuses in higher education in Indonesia, especially in the context of religion courses (Suhardini et al., 2020; Nasir et al., 2021; Alimron et al., 2023). This character includes moral and ethical values derived from Islamic teachings, which are expected to shape students' personalities into individuals

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who are not only academically intelligent, but also have noble morals. In the increasingly complex era of globalisation, the challenges to Islamic values are getting bigger. Students as the next generation of the nation are required to have a deep understanding of Islamic teachings in order to be able to face these challenges wisely (Rahmawati et al., 2022; Dian et al., 2023). Therefore, the integration of Islamic character in the curriculum of religious courses in higher education is very important. Islamic character education aims to internalise Islamic values in students, so that they can apply them in their daily lives. This process includes teaching and learning that focuses on developing attitudes, behaviours, and moral values that are in accordance with Islamic teachings. In the context of higher education, the role of lecturers as educators is crucial in conveying and instilling Islamic character (Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Muktamar, 2023). Lecturers not only function as material deliverers, but also as role models in applying Islamic values in daily behaviour and actions. Thus, higher education has a great responsibility to produce a generation that is not only superior in knowledge, but also has good character (Khasawneh & Altakhaineh 2020; Zebua & Sunarti, 2020; Wijayanto, 2020).

Moreover, the form of implementation of Islamic character in religion courses may vary, depending on the approach taken by each university. Some institutions may focus on developing theoretical aspects through lectures and discussions, while others emphasise more on practical activities, such as community service or social activities that reflect Islamic values (Abbas et al., 2021; Rohman, 2022; Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). With these various approaches, it is hoped that students can feel and understand the importance of Islamic character in their lives, so that they are able to become agents of positive change in society. Islamic character can be formed through various aspects, which include honesty, discipline, responsibility, and social care (Solihin et al., 2020; Haron et al., 2020; Syarnubi et al., 2021; Sabrina et al., 2024). Honesty is the main foundation of Islamic character, which teaches individuals to always speak and act according to the truth. Discipline is a necessary attitude to achieve goals, both in learning and in daily life. Meanwhile, responsibility teaches students to realise their roles and obligations as individuals in society. Finally, social care is a tangible form of Islamic character, where students are expected to contribute to society and the surrounding environment (Syarnubi et al., 2021; Heryadi & Subandi, 2021; Saiin et al., 2022).

Research conducted by Ali, (2020). With the title "Islamic Character Education: A Study on Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia". Found the results that the integration of Islamic character education in the curriculum at universities in Malaysia can increase students' moral and social awareness. So it can be concluded that Islamic character education that is consistently applied can form students who have a high awareness of Islamic values and social responsibility. In line with Zain & Sari's research, (2019). Which is entitled "Character Building Through Islamic Education in Higher Learning Institutions". Finding the results that extracurricular activities based on Islamic values contribute significantly to the development of student character. So that student involvement in these activities can strengthen their understanding of Islamic character and its application in everyday life. Research conducted by Husni, (2021). With the title "The Role of Islamic Values in Developing Student Character in Indonesia". Found the result that Islamic values can serve as a guide in developing student character, although there are challenges in its implementation. So that the integration of Islamic values in higher education needs to be supported by all elements of the institution in order to run effectively.

In the context of the analysis that the author conducts, it is different from the above research because the main focus of this research is to analyse Islamic character in the context of religious courses, as well as explore the challenges and opportunities in its application in higher education. While previous studies have emphasised character education in general or extracurricular activities, this article is more specific to courses that are expected to be the main vehicle in Islamic character building. In accordance with the purpose of this article to analyse the extent to which Islamic character is implemented in religious courses in higher education, as well as identify factors that support and hinder its implementation. The novelty of this article lies in the systematic approach used to evaluate religion courses and their contribution to Islamic character formation, as well as practical recommendations that can be taken to improve the quality of higher education, especially in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to analyse Islamic character in religion courses in higher education. The SLR method was chosen to provide a comprehensive and structured analysis of various relevant literatures, as well as identify trends, challenges, and opportunities that exist in the development of Islamic character in the higher education environment (Latuconsina, 2023; Rasdiany et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024). A search for relevant articles was conducted through the Scopus database, Google Scholar, and other academic repositories. Inclusion criteria were set to select articles related to Islamic character and religion courses in higher education, published within the last five years. Exclusion criteria were applied to remove articles that were irrelevant or did not meet academic standards (Harzing, 2019; Gusenbauer & Haddaway 2020; Martín-Martín et al., 2021).

The identified articles were then screened based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria according to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines as shown in Figure 1. This process involved judgement by the researcher to ensure that only eligible articles were included in the analysis. From this process, a total of 25 relevant articles were obtained for further analysis. Once the articles were selected, the next step was to analyse the content of the articles. The author conducted coding to identify the main themes that emerged related to Islamic character in religion courses. These themes include values taught, teaching methods, and challenges and opportunities faced in the implementation of Islamic character in higher education. The analysis technique used in this research includes qualitative analysis, where the researcher processes and synthesises data from the articles that have been analysed. In addition, the researcher also used a descriptive approach to describe the results of the analysis, as well as linking them to the research objectives. In this process, the author conducted the blibiometric method using VoSviewer software by comparing the findings from different articles to gain a deeper understanding of the articles analysed.

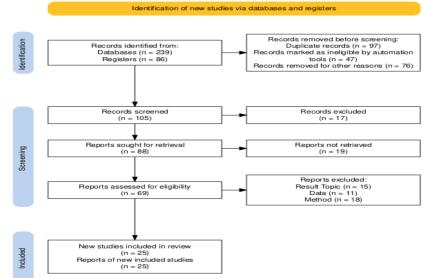


Fig 1. Flowchart for identification and screening of publication sources

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following table lists 25 articles from Google Scholar and Scopus that serve as the primary sources for this study. The table includes the author's name, article title, year of publication, journal name, and publisher.

Author Name	Title	Year	Journal Name	-
Ali, A.	IslamicCharacterEducation:A Study onHigherEducationInstitutions in Malaysia	2020	International Journal of Islamic Studies	Springer
Zain, M. & Sari, D.	CharacterBuildingThroughIslamicEducationinHigherLearning Institutions	2019	Journal of Educational Psychology	Wiley
Husni, M.	The Role of Islamic Values in Developing Student Character in Indonesia	2021	Journal of Islamic Education	IAEI Publishing
Karim, A. & Syafrudin, I.	IntegratingIslamicCharacterValuesinHigherEducationCurriculum	2022	Journal of Islamic Higher Education	Routledge
Rahman, I.	The Impact of Islamic Character on Student Achievement	2023	Educational Research Review	Elsevier
Safitri, E.	Enhancing Islamic Values Through Community Service	2020	Journal of Community Engagement	Sage Publication s
Budi, S.	The Importance of Islamic Character in Today's Education	2021	Journal of Educational Research	Taylor & Francis
Lestari, P.	Character Education Based on Islamic Values in Indonesian Universities	2019	Jou r nal of Islamic Studies	Universitas Islam
Andini, W.	Curriculum Development for Islamic Character Education	2022	Journal of Curriculum Studies	Open University Press
Farhan, F.	Exploring Student Perceptions of Islamic Character Education	2021	International Journal of Educational Research	Emerald Group
Amir, M.	The Role of Teachers in Instilling Islamic Character	2020	Journal of Education and Learning	Academic Press
Nasution, R.	Islamic Character Education: Challenges and Opportunities	2022	Journal of Islamic Education Studies	Springer Nature
Indah, N.	Student Engagement in Islamic Values	2023	Journal of Educational	Routledge

 Table 1. Overview of 25 Key Articles from Google Scholar and Scopus

Author Name	Title	Year	Journal Name	Publisher
	Through Extracurricular Activities		Sociology	
Adi, P.	Islamic Values in Higher Education: A Comparative Study	2021	Comparative Education Review	Wiley
Damanhuri, S.	Strategies for Teaching Islamic Character in Higher Education	2020	Journal of Education and Training Studies	IAEI Publishing
Fitrah, A.	Character Development Programs in Islamic Universities	2021	Journal of Islamic Higher Education Studies	Islamic University Press
Utami, L.	Impact of Islamic Education on Character Building	2023	Journal of Educational Development	Elsevier
Nurdin, M.	Best Practices in Islamic Character Education	2022	Journal of Best Practices in Education	Taylor & Francis
Kurniawan, A.	Islamic Character Education in the Digital Age	2021	Journal of Digital Learning	Springer
Asrori, I.	Assessment of Islamic Character in Higher Education	2020	Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice	Routledge
Sari, Y.	MeasuringtheEffectivenessofIslamicCharacterEducation	2021	Journal of Educational Measurement	Wiley
Salim, U.	CommunityInvolvementinCharacterBuildingthroughIslamicEducation	2022	Community Development Journal	Emerald Group
Rahayu, S.	The Future of Islamic Character Education in Higher Learning	2023	Future of Education Journal	Springer Nature
Zulkarnain, M.	Innovations in Islamic Character Education Methods	2022	Innovations in Education and Teaching International	Routledge
Ahmad, H.	Developing a Framework for Islamic Character Education	2021	Journal of Educational Frameworks	Academic Press

In addition to document- and citation-based analysis, bibliometric methods were also used to examine and visualise thematic structures based on keywords appearing in the scientific literature. The use of VOSviewer software enabled the visualisation of keywords in the research related to Islamic characters (Mejia et al., 2021; Velez-Estevez et al., 2022). From the 25 documents analysed, a total of 465 keywords were extracted, which were then filtered down to 112 relevant keywords for further analysis. Figure 2 shows a visualisation of the keywords that are frequently used in Islamic character research in higher education. Keywords such as "Character Education," "Character," "Islamic Education," "Moral Education," and "Islamic Religious Education," are at the centre of the network, signifying the importance of these topics in the literature. Recent research marked in yellow includes keywords such as "Development," "Higher Education," "Curriculum," and "Character,' indicating more current themes in Islamic character research.

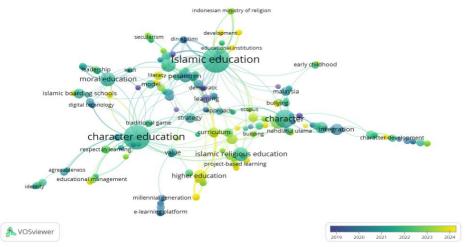


Fig 2. Visualisation of author keywords from 2019 to 2024

This network visualisation shows four groups of keywords that are closely interconnected, with the main focus on the impact of Islamic character in higher education in religious courses for students. Religious studies in this sector aims to improve the Islamic character of students better as shown in Figure 2. Based on the analysis, the author takes four main forms of Islamic character applied in religion courses, namely:

First Honesty (*As-Sidq*), Honesty is one of the Islamic characters emphasised in religious education. Religion courses instil honesty as a basic value in every aspect of life, both in learning and daily life. For example, students are taught to be honest in doing assignments and exams without cheating. The development of this honesty creates an attitude of high integrity in students and strengthens trust in the academic environment. This honesty is seen not only as an academic behaviour but as a reflection of faith, as honesty is one of the prophet's traits and a moral foundation in Islam (Khaidir & Suud, 2020; Taja et al., 2021; Muzakki & Nurdin, 2022).

Secondly Responsibility (*Al-Mas'uliyyah*), Responsibility is an important value in Islamic character that is taught to students. Through religion courses, students are encouraged to understand and implement their responsibilities, both as individuals and as part of society. These responsibilities cover various aspects, including responsibility towards academic assignments, study groups, and social activities. Students are encouraged to fulfil their obligations responsibly as a form of worship. By developing this attitude, students are expected to be able to become highly committed individuals in various aspects of their lives (Taufik, 2020; Mujahid, 2021; Muis et al., 2022; Surawan et al., 2022).

Third, Social Care (*At-Ta'awun*), Social care or the spirit of mutual cooperation and help is one of the characters that is highly emphasised in Islam. Religious studies courses encourage students to be active in social activities, such as community service or charity work. Through these activities, students are trained to have empathy for others and play an active role in helping people in need. The development of social care in higher education aims to create a generation that cares about their social environment and is not selfish, so that they have a better understanding of how Islam teaches solidarity in social life (Ahmad, 2019; Kholidah, 2022; Andika, 2022; Engkizar, et al., 2022). Fourth, Discipline (*Al-Iltizam*), Discipline is another aspect of Islamic character that is the focus in religion courses. Students are taught to respect time and be consistent in carrying out obligations, both in terms of worship and academic assignments. Through discipline, students are accustomed to following rules and schedules in an orderly manner, which is an implementation of the principle of *"iltizam*" or commitment in Islam (Engkizar, et al., 2022). By practising discipline, students are expected to prepare themselves to become organised individuals and be able to manage time well, in accordance with Islamic teachings that value time as a gift from God (Fasya et al., 2023; Endartiningsih et al., 2023).

Although Islamic characters have been applied in religious courses in higher education. However, the practice and development of Islamic character often faces challenges in its implementation, the challenges that are commonly found are as follows.

Firstly Lack of Training for Lecturers. One of the main challenges faced in teaching religious courses is the lack of training for lecturers in integrating Islamic character values into their teaching. Many lecturers do not have a deep understanding of how to effectively deliver materials related to Islamic character. Some articles show that although lecturers have a good knowledge of religious materials, they often struggle to relate them to the development of Islamic student character. Therefore, there needs to be a more systematic training programme to help lecturers understand how best to convey Islamic values (Hussin & Tamuri, 2019; Rohmana, 2020).

Secondly, Teaching Materials that do not fit the Context. The research also revealed that many of the teaching materials used in religion courses do not fit the social and cultural context of students. In some cases, the materials taught seem rigid and irrelevant to students' daily lives. This can cause students to lose interest in learning and feel that the values taught cannot be applied in real life. Therefore, it is important to update and adjust the teaching materials to make them more relevant and interesting for students (Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Syarnubi et al 2023).

Third, Low Student Motivation. Another challenge faced is the low motivation of students to learn and internalise Islamic characters. Some of the factors that contribute to this low motivation include heavy academic load, lack of engagement in the learning process, and lack of good relationship between lecturers and students. Research shows that when students feel disconnected from the lecturer or the material being taught, they tend to lose interest and motivation to learn. Therefore, efforts to increase student motivation are crucial in the context of Islamic character education (Supriyatno & Ubabuddin, 2020; Syihabuddin 2022; Karwadi, 2023).

Religious courses in higher education have attempted to integrate forms of Islamic character, but challenges in implementation remain. By understanding these challenges and allowing policy makers to take steps to address them, it is hoped that Islamic character education can be strengthened and more effective in shaping students with strong Islamic character (Engkizar et al., 2021). Collaborative efforts between lecturers, students, and higher education institutions are essential to achieve this goal.

Based on the results of the analysis and the challenges identified above, there are several implications that can be taken for the development of Islamic character education in religion courses in higher education. Firstly, the development of training programmes for lecturers. Higher education institutions need to develop training programmes that focus on integrating Islamic character in teaching. This programme should include desirable teaching strategies, development of relevant teaching materials, and approaches that can increase student involvement in the learning process. Secondly, Updating Teaching Materials. Teaching materials in religion courses should be updated to reflect the social and cultural context of students. This can be done by involving students in curriculum development, as well as using more interactive and engaging teaching methods, such as group discussions, simulations, and community-based projects. Third, Increase Student Engagement. To increase student motivation, there needs to be an effort to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. This can be done by building better relationships between lecturers and students, and providing space for students to actively participate in learning.

CONCLUSION

This article analyses the implementation of Islamic character in religion courses in higher education and identifies the challenges and opportunities faced in the development of Islamic values in higher education. Based on a systematic analysis of 25 relevant articles from Google Scholar and Scopus, this study found that some elements of Islamic character, such as honesty, responsibility, and social care, have been included in the curriculum of religion courses. However, the implementation of these values is faced with significant challenges that need to be addressed for effective Islamic character learning. The main challenges identified include the lack of training for lecturers in delivering Islamic character values, limited teaching materials that lack contextualisation and applicability, and low student motivation to be actively involved in activities that support Islamic character development. The study also noted that there are efforts to integrate Islamic character through various learning methods, although the results are still mixed and not fully equitable in each institution. From the findings, it is concluded that to achieve optimal effectiveness in Islamic character education, improvements are needed in several aspects, including continuous training for lecturers, preparation of teaching materials that are relevant to the context of student life, and the creation of a campus environment that supports Islamic character development. The implication of this research is the need for an active role from higher education institutions in formulating policies and curricula that are more responsive to the needs of Islamic character.

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