



## Internalizing Islamic Values in Student Character Building: A Case Study at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan, Nagan Raya Regency

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the process, forms of activities, operational strategies, and the impact of internalizing Islamic values on student character formation at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan, Nagan Raya Regency. This study employed a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach, collecting data through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies with the principal, teachers, students, and parents from January to June 2026. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The results showed that the internalization of Islamic values progresses through three stages: value transformation, transaction, and trans internalization. This process is integrated through intra-curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular pathways, utilizing five key strategies: exemplary behaviour (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, persuasive advice (*mau'izhah*), monitoring, and parental partnership. This internalization is proven to have a significant impact on shaping a holistic student character across five key dimensions: increased worship awareness (spiritual), discipline and courtesy (moral), social empathy (social), ethics-based critical thinking (intellectual), and strong independence and work ethic (productive).

### 1. Introduction

In the era of modern education, academic excellence is no longer the sole benchmark for evaluating student success (Zahroh et al., 2024). Along with the dynamics of a global society facing rapid technological disruption and shifting social norms, student character building has emerged as a fundamental pillar for sustainable development (Indriasari et al., 2024). Today's educational institutions bear a dual responsibility: they must serve not only as centres for intellectual growth but also as spaces for conditioning moral and ethical development. (Karakter et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic education, this dual role is deeply rooted in the concept of noble character (*akhlak mulia*). This concept emphasizes that knowledge (*ilm*) is fundamentally incomplete and can even lead to

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negative consequences if it is not accompanied by a solid spiritual and moral foundation (Kholid et al., 2025). Therefore, integrating character building into the core of education is an urgent necessity, rather than a mere pedagogical supplement.

Although the importance of character building is widely recognized, the process of instilling moral values into students' daily lives remains a complex challenge. Many educational institutions treat character education merely as a cognitive or theoretical exercise that relies heavily on memorizing formal rules (Hadi, 2019). However, genuine character development requires a holistic approach that goes beyond textual learning in the classroom (Sinurat, 2024). This is where the concept of internalization becomes crucial. Internalization is a transformative process through which religious and social values are deeply integrated into an individual's subjective awareness (Hakimah, 2022), shifting the underlying motivation from external compliance to inner consciousness (Sepira, 2024). Within the framework of Islamic education, this involves a comprehensive internalization that encompasses five core dimensions: spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, and productive.

While Islamic-based educational institutions or boarding schools (*pesantren*) focus on character building through a boarding system and an integrated religious curriculum, public senior high schools operate within a different dynamic. For instance, SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan in Nagan Raya Regency, Aceh Province, integrates Islamic values into the national curriculum structure while simultaneously responding to the cultural demands of a local community deeply rooted in religious values.

This specific institutional context creates an interesting dynamic in how character education is managed. To achieve deep value integration, the school must strategically deploy three educational pathways: formal learning (intra-curricular), routine habituation (co-curricular), and voluntary social engagement (extra-curricular), relying heavily on teachers' exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) as well as close cooperation with parents.

Understanding the empirical relationship between systematic value internalization and actual student behavioral manifestations is essential for future educational policy formulation. This study aims to analyze how Islamic values are processed, instructed, and manifested in students' lives within a public-school environment. By examining operational strategies and identifying environmental facilitators and barriers, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive qualitative blueprint for holistic character building. Ultimately, this study asserts that when religious values are successfully internalized, they cease to be abstract theories and instead become an active moral compass guiding students to become ethical, socially responsible, and intellectually resilient citizens.

## **2. Literature Review**

Value internalization is a profound process in which an external doctrine, norm, or value is adopted and integrated into a person's personality structure, shifting into a personal belief that drives behavior without any external coercion or pressure (Hestiningtyas, 2020). Theoretically, this internalization process does not occur instantly but progresses through three interconnected and continuous evolutionary stages (Kroh & Piaget, 2025). The first stage is value transformation, a phase where educators merely communicate, inform, and explain values of goodness to students, meaning the interaction remains one-way and resides solely within the cognitive domain or conceptual understanding (Shodiq, 2017). This process then develops into the second stage, value transaction, which is characterized by dialogic interaction, in-depth discussion, and reciprocal communication between teacher and student. In this transaction phase, students begin to reason, respond, perceive the benefits, and experiment with these values in their daily attitudes, thereby touching the affective domain. The ultimate pinnacle of this process is value transinternalization, a phase in which these religious values have completely fused with the student's personality, mentality, and conscience. The positive behaviors emerging in this final stage are no longer driven by fear of formal regulations or

the pursuit of praise, but are born from a deep inner consciousness and an independent spiritual drive within the psychomotor domain.

In the perspective of Islamic education, character building culminates in the manifestation of noble character (*akhlak mulia*), which is sourced directly from the universal values of the Qur'an and Hadith (Hidayat et al., 2024). A complete Islamic character does not merely touch upon narrow aspects of religious rituals, but encompasses five main dimensions that form the profile of a whole human being (*insan kamil*) (Irawan et al., 2025). The first dimension is the spiritual dimension, which is oriented toward the vertical relationship between humans and the Creator (*hablum minallah*), characterized by firmness of faith, piety, and the growth of an inner need to perform worship independently and consistently (Dan & Membentuk, 2025). Furthermore, the moral dimension manifests in the form of solid personal integrity, honesty, life discipline, and the nobility of personal ethics, such as implementing a culture of courtesy in daily interactions (Sanubari et al., 2026). Horizontal relationships among fellow creations are harmoniously accommodated within the social dimension, which is actualized through developing empathy, tolerance toward diversity, a culture of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and active involvement in real social care actions. Meanwhile, the intellectual dimension includes the ability to think critically, objectively, logically, and to uphold academic honesty, where students are able to weigh the benefits of actions using religious moral standards (Hikmah, 2026). Lastly, the productive dimension is reflected through possessing a high work ethic, independence in completing tasks, resilience when facing academic challenges, and effective time management skills between rights and obligations (Azzahra et al., 2024).

The implementation of character education within a public senior high school environment possesses distinct characteristics and challenges compared to specialized religious institutions like boarding schools (*pesantren*), which are supported by a 24-hour residential system. Public schools are required to be more creative, adaptive, and innovative in optimizing the full potential of the school ecosystem, which is constrained by the duration of formal instructional hours. These characteristics demand a structured and massive division of character-building pathways through three main pillars: intra-curricular activities in the form of contextually integrating Islamic values into formal subjects; co-curricular activities through routine daily religious habituation programs at school; and extra-curricular activities as a platform for student organization and self-actualization (Azzahra et al., 2024). The success of this ecosystem heavily relies on the synergy of comprehensively executed school operational strategies. These strategies include providing real exemplary behavior from the principal and teaching staff (*uswah hasanah*), creating a supportive school environmental culture, utilizing persuasive counseling approaches (*mau'izhah*), maintaining a consistent behavior monitoring system through periodic evaluation instruments, and weaving a strong partnership with parents to safeguard the continuity of these values when students are outside of school hours.

### **3. Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to explore in depth the process of internalizing Islamic values at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan, Nagan Raya Regency, Aceh. This field research was conducted over a six-month period, from January to June 2026. Research subjects were selected purposively, including the principal, teachers, students, and parents/guardians, while the object of research focused on the manifestations of student character across spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, and productive dimensions.

Primary and secondary data were collected through participant observation of the school's religious culture, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and administrative documentation studies. Data analysis applied the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Agama et al., 2022). To

ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings, the researcher implemented data credibility testing strategies including source triangulation, method triangulation, member checks, and an audit trail (Luthfiyani & Murhayati, 2024).

#### **4. Research Findings**

##### **4.1 Stages of the Islamic Value Internalization Process**

Based on the research findings gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan, Nagan Raya Regency, it was found that the process of internalizing Islamic values takes place through a planned, systematic, and adaptive structure. This process of instilling Islamic values does not occur instantly, but progresses gradually through three main phases: value transformation, value transaction, and value transinternalization (Qolbi & Khoiroh, 2025). These three stages simultaneously target three domains of student development, namely cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude), and psychomotor (actual behavior).

In the value transformation stage, teachers act as the primary communicators in delivering information and conceptual understanding regarding Islamic values. Interview data indicate that Islamic Education (PAI) teachers along with social science cluster teachers (such as Civic Education/PPKn) consistently link national curriculum materials with verses from the Qur'an and Hadith. This value transformation is reinforced through the provision of verbal advice (*mau'izhah*) and periodic guidance, both within the classroom and during school ceremonial activities. In this initial phase, the primary focus is on developing students' logical understanding of why a certain value, such as honesty or responsibility, must be upheld in the view of Islam.

The next stage is value transaction, which is characterized by dialogic interaction and two-way communication between educators and students. Students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of information, but are actively involved in responding to, discussing, and experimenting with these values through the school ecosystem. Field observations show that this value transaction space manifests in group discussions, moral case study analyses, and students' active involvement in routine religious activities. Students begin to build an emotional attachment to the taught values as they experience the direct benefits of implementing them in their interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers.

The deepest stage and the culmination of this process is value transinternalization. In this phase, Islamic values that were previously external instructions have merged into the students' inner consciousness and independent personality. Indicators of success at this stage are evident from the emergence of consistent positive behavior without requiring stimuli such as strict supervision, coercion, or the lure of rewards from teachers. Students perform worship, maintain courtesy, and uphold academic integrity out of their own spiritual consciousness (*muraqabah*), namely the deep conviction that every single one of their actions is constantly observed by Allah SWT.

The success of this transinternalization stage, in turn, manifests concretely in students' daily behavior through the strengthening of five interconnected character dimensions. The values that have crystallized within their hearts are no longer stagnant as theoretical concepts, but transform into the driving axis of a solid spiritual dimension, noble moral dimension, adaptive social dimension sensitivity, academic honesty in the intellectual dimension, and the birth of a productive dimension characterized by independence and a high work ethic. Through the integration of all these dimensions, the school ecosystem does not merely produce cognitively intelligent generations, but successfully gives birth to emotionally and spiritually mature individuals, whose every action remains aligned with the noble Islamic values that have become an inseparable part of their identity.

#### 4.2 Implementation of Activity Forms and School Strategies

The effectiveness of the Islamic value internalization process at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan is firmly supported by the integration of three curricular activity pathways: intra-curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities. The intra-curricular pathway centers on integrating Islamic values into the formal classroom instructional structure using a contextual approach. The co-curricular pathway is manifested in the form of daily habituation programs that all students must join, such as reading the Qur'an together before the first period begins, performing congregational Zuhr prayer at the school prayer room (*mushala*), and the tradition of collective prayer. Meanwhile, the extra-curricular pathway provides a physical space for student self-actualization through the Islamic Youth Organization (*Rohis*), youth Islamic study circles, and direct involvement in community service projects and humanitarian actions.

To run these three forms of activities, the school implements five operational strategies synergistically:

- Exemplary Strategy (*Uswah Hasanah*): The principal and teachers position themselves as living role models. Being on time, using polite words, and showing punctuality in performing worship demonstrated by educators become the main mirror naturally emulated by the students.
- Habituation Strategy: The massive daily repetition of religious activities and the implementation of the "Greet, Smile, and Say Hello" culture successfully turn formal actions into automatic habits embedded in the students' daily character.
- Advice-Giving Strategy (*Mau'izhah*): A persuasive and communicative approach is used by teachers, especially Guidance and Counseling (*BK*) teachers, to touch the emotional aspects of students when ethical norm violations occur.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy: The school conducts periodic behavior monitoring through student character development logbooks, duty teacher reports, and regular evaluations in faculty meetings to map out the effectiveness of the development programs.
- Cooperation with Parents Strategy: Partnerships are built through intensive communication to align the monitoring of students' worship and behavior when they are outside of school hours, ensuring that the values instilled at school do not fade when students return to their family environment.

The effectiveness of internalizing Islamic values applied at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan is successfully realized through the integration of three curriculum pathways—namely intra-curricular (contextual formal learning), co-curricular (daily worship habituation), and extra-curricular (socio-religious activities)—which are driven synergistically through five operational strategies including teacher exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), religious culture habituation, persuasive advice (*mau'izhah*), periodic monitoring, and intensive partnerships with parents to maintain student character consistency both inside and outside of school.

#### 4.3 Profile of Student Character Manifestations

The tangible impact of integrating the stages, activity forms, and strategies for internalizing Islamic values at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan is comprehensively reflected in the student character profile, which is divided into five main dimensions:

**Table.1** Profile of Student Character

No	Character Dimension	Manifestations & Student Behavioral Indicators
1	Spiritual	Faith, piety, independent need for worship, tawakal (reliance on God), and religious consciousness.
2	Moral	Noble character, academic integrity, discipline, courtesy (Greet, Smile, Say Hello), and trustworthiness ( <i>amanah</i> ).
3	Social	Empathy, tolerance among peers, a culture of mutual cooperation ( <i>gotong royong</i> ), and involvement in real social action.
4	Intellectual	Critical thinking, maintaining academic ethics, and considering Islamic law (halal-haram) in taking action.
5	Productive	Good work ethic, independence, effective time management, resilience, and high initiative.

In the spiritual dimension, a significant shift in motivation occurred among the students. Performing congregational prayers and reading the Qur'an are no longer viewed as pressing school rules, but have mutated into essential inner needs. Students express spiritual peace and a more stable emotional maturity when facing academic pressure.

In the moral dimension, value internalization results in a tangible strengthening of noble character. Student in disciplinary rates, such as arriving late to class or skipping school, have decreased. This moral character is also manifested in the students' high level of respect for teachers, as evidenced by the implementation of polite communication ethics and a culture of respecting the rights of peers within the school environment.

In the social dimension, the instillation of Islamic values successfully shapes the students' collective sensitivity. Attitudes of empathy, solidarity, and tolerance flourish within social interactions among students. When social fundraising for humanitarian causes or community clean-ups is organized, students show high initiative and enthusiasm to cooperate without any coercion from the school administration.

In the intellectual dimension, students demonstrate mature thinking ethics development. They are not only cognitively intelligent in mastering science and technology, but are also able to filter information critically using an Islamic moral perspective. Students begin to consider logical consequences and the value of blessings (halal-haram/good-bad) before making crucial decisions, alongside upholding academic honesty, such as not cheating during exams.

In the productive dimension, the internalization of the values of effort (*ikhtiar*) and consistency (*istiqamah*) successfully ignites a positive work ethic in the students' souls. Students show high independence in completing school assignments, demonstrate effective time management skills between studying and organizing, and possess strong resilience and creativity when facing challenges or difficulties in the learning process.

Accumulatively, the results of this study confirm that the holistic character development model based on Islamic values applied at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan is proven effective in producing balanced generations of students, where intellectual intelligence is consistently guided by moral strength and spiritual maturity.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the research findings at SMA Negeri 2 Seunagan, Nagan Raya Regency, it can be concluded that the process of internalizing Islamic values takes place systematically through three main stages: value transformation (cognitive), value transaction (affective), and value transinternalization (psychomotor). The success of this process is fully supported by the integration of three activity pathways: intra-curricular through formal classroom learning, co-curricular through routine daily worship habituation, and extra-curricular through socio-religious activities. This

implementation is consistently reinforced by the synergy of five operational strategies, which include real teacher exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), school culture habituation, persuasive advice-giving (*mau'izhah*), periodic monitoring, and intensive cooperation with students' parents.

This comprehensive combination is proven to exert a significant influence on holistic student character building across five main dimensions. The manifestation of this impact is demonstrated by an increased consciousness of independent worship (spiritual), a decrease in indisciplinary rates alongside the strengthening of courtesy (moral), high empathy and mutual cooperation (social), sharp critical thinking based on academic ethics (intellectual), and the formation of high independence and work ethic (productive). Consequently, the internalization of Islamic values at this school effectively shapes a balanced generation possessing sustainable intellectual intelligence, moral nobility, and spiritual maturity.

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