



Internalizing Islamic Character Values to Cultivate Students' Humility at SMAN 2 Plus Panyabungan

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ABSTRACT

Character education in Islamic contexts plays a crucial role in shaping students' values and behaviors, particularly in cultivating virtues such as humility. Although prior studies have examined Islamic education and character formation, limited research has explored how students personally internalize humility as a lived and transformative experience. This study addresses this gap by investigating how students experience, interpret, and internalize Islamic values of humility within Islamic education at SMAN 2 Plus Panyabungan. Employing a phenomenological approach, the study draws on in-depth interviews with 12 students, with data analyzed thematically to uncover the underlying structures of meaning in their experiences. The findings reveal three central mechanisms of internalization: (1) dialogical moral engagement in classroom interactions, (2) teachers' embodied role modeling as a living example of humility, and (3) students' reflective self-evaluation that transforms doctrinal knowledge into personal moral commitment. Importantly, humility was not internalized merely as a cognitive understanding of religious doctrine, but as a habitual disposition manifested in respectful communication, openness to feedback, and reduced self-centeredness in peer interactions. These findings demonstrate that the internalization of humility is a dynamic process shaped by relational, experiential, and reflective dimensions rather than by formal instruction alone. This study contributes to the literature by offering an experiential model of humility internalization in Islamic education, highlighting the central role of subjective meaning-making and teacher-student relational dynamics in character development. The findings provide practical implications for Islamic educators by emphasizing reflective pedagogy and value embodiment as key strategies for sustainable character formation. Future research is encouraged to examine longitudinal impacts and broader socio-cultural influences on the development of humility.



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INTRODUCTION

The internalization of Islamic character values within educational contexts has long been a subject of interest in Islamic educational research. In many Muslim-majority societies, Islamic education plays a crucial role in shaping the values, ethics, and behaviors of students, often focusing on character development alongside academic achievement. Within this framework, humility is regarded as a central virtue in Islam, often highlighted in both religious texts and classroom teachings (Hipni, 2023; Zhao et al., 2025). Humility, in the Islamic sense, involves recognizing one's dependence on God and maintaining modesty in actions, speech, and self-perception (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). This concept extends beyond individual behavior, influencing social interactions, community life, and even professional conduct. In schools, particularly in Islamic educational settings, educators are tasked with instilling these values in students, thus shaping their character in line with Islamic principles.

Despite the emphasis on character education, research on how students internalize and apply these values, especially humility, in their daily lives remains limited. While there is an extensive body of literature on Islamic education and its role in character development, few studies delve deeply into the subjective experiences of students regarding how Islamic values are internalized and how these internalized values influence their actions and worldview (ElAlfy et al., 2025; Muradova et al., 2025). The importance of understanding this process lies not only in the educational realm but also in the broader social and cultural context. Islamic education, especially in public schools, serves as a bridge between traditional religious teachings and modern educational systems, creating a unique environment where cultural, social, and religious values intersect.

Exploring the lived experiences of students in internalizing Islamic values, particularly humility, offers invaluable insights into how these values shape students' behavior and self-concept. By focusing on the subjective experiences of students, this research aims to capture the nuanced and personal ways in which Islamic teachings manifest in their lives, going beyond theoretical or instructional approaches to reveal the deeper, lived reality of students. This phenomenological approach is essential for understanding how young people navigate the tension between societal expectations and religious teachings, and how they make meaning of these experiences in their own lives.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals within particular phenomena has gained significant traction in educational and social sciences, particularly within the field of phenomenology. This approach provides valuable insights into how people make sense of their world, allowing for an exploration of the subjective meanings they attach to experiences (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). In the context of Islamic education, understanding how students internalize Islamic values, especially humility, is critical to identifying the personal and transformative impacts these values have on their behavior and identity. However, exploring such deep, personal experiences requires a methodology capable of capturing the nuances of individual perception and meaning-making, which can be elusive in more traditional quantitative research methods.

The challenge in exploring the internalization of Islamic character values lies in the inherently subjective nature of the phenomenon. While quantitative methods can assess general trends or patterns of behavior, they fail to provide an in-depth understanding of how these values are experienced, internalized, and applied by individuals (Aprilianto et al., 2024; Mahmudi et al., 2024). The complexity of character development, especially in a religious educational context, cannot be fully captured through surveys or numerical data alone. Phenomenological approaches, with their emphasis on individual lived experiences, offer the most suitable framework for studying such phenomena. They allow researchers to uncover the essence of students' internalization of values like humility, which often transcends observable behaviors and is deeply embedded in personal cognition, feelings, and attitudes.

Despite the growing interest in phenomenological research in education, many existing studies fall short of thoroughly examining the lived experiences of students regarding the internalization of Islamic values. Traditional methods have tended to overlook the significance of personal reflection and the intricate ways in which values like humility shape individual identities. As such, much of the previous research has been limited in its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic education impacts students on a deeply personal level (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). This limitation highlights the need for a more nuanced, qualitative exploration of how these values are perceived and internalized by students, which is precisely what this research aims to address.

In the context of Islamic education, many studies have focused on assessing the impact of character education programs using traditional quantitative methods. These approaches typically rely on measurable outcomes such as academic performance, behavioral changes, or surveys that gauge general attitudes (Hilmy & Utami, 2021; Kharlie & Supriyadi, 2022). While such methods can provide useful insights into trends and correlations, they fall short in capturing the deep, personal experiences that shape students' internalization of values like humility. As a result, existing research

tends to offer a limited understanding of how students meaningfully engage with and incorporate these values into their daily lives. This approach often overlooks the subtle nuances of students' personal reflections and the emotional and cognitive processes involved in internalizing Islamic teachings.

The lack of in-depth exploration into the subjective experiences of students highlights the need for a more comprehensive method that can uncover the essence of these experiences. Traditional methods fail to address the richness of students' lived experiences, leaving significant gaps in understanding how Islamic values, particularly humility, are internalized on a personal level. This gap underscores the importance of adopting a phenomenological approach, which focuses on understanding the personal meanings that students attach to their experiences (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). By emphasizing the lived experiences of students, phenomenology allows for a more holistic exploration of how values are understood, felt, and practiced, offering deeper insights that go beyond superficial behavioral observations. This research aims to fill this gap by using phenomenology to explore the internalization of humility and its impact on students, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Previous research on character education in Islamic contexts often employs quantitative methods to assess the impact of educational programs. Studies have explored how Islamic values, such as humility, are incorporated into curricula and how they affect students' behaviors. However, these studies typically focus on observable outcomes, such as changes in behavior or academic performance, without delving into the personal, lived experiences of students (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023). The theoretical frameworks surrounding these values, such as the teachings of Islam on humility, are often addressed without sufficient attention to how students subjectively interpret and internalize these concepts (Alqhaiwi et al., 2024; Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022). This gap in the literature underscores the need for an approach that focuses on the personal meaning-making processes of students, something that phenomenology is particularly well-suited to address.

The proposed method for this study is phenomenology, which offers an in-depth exploration of students' lived experiences of internalizing Islamic character values. By focusing on individual experiences, this approach will provide insights into how students perceive, reflect on, and apply humility in their lives. Phenomenology is chosen for its ability to uncover the essence of experiences that cannot be captured through traditional quantitative methods. This method is particularly effective in addressing the knowledge gap identified earlier, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the personal and emotional dimensions of internalizing values like humility. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, this research will offer a rich, nuanced perspective on the phenomenon that quantitative studies often overlook.

The article is structured to guide readers through the investigation of the internalization of humility in Islamic education. The introduction outlines the context and significance of the phenomenon, followed by a description of the phenomenological approach used to explore it. After discussing the methodology, the article moves into data collection and analysis, including the thematic exploration of students' experiences. The results are followed by a discussion of the findings, their implications for Islamic education, and suggestions for future research. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key insights gained from the study and emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of students in character education.

RESEARCH METHODS

Study Design

This study adopts a phenomenological approach, which is particularly suited for exploring lived experiences and the meanings that individuals attach to them. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by participants, providing a deep and rich description of subjective experiences. The relevance of this approach to the current research lies in its ability to capture how students internalize Islamic character values, specifically humility, within the context of Islamic education. By focusing on participants' perceptions, the phenomenological design

allows for the exploration of the personal and transformative experiences of students, which might otherwise be overlooked in more quantitative approaches (Lutz & Knox, 2014; McNabb, 2015). This study specifically employs a descriptive phenomenology approach, as outlined by Husserl, to describe the participants' lived experiences with humility and Islamic education. This approach emphasizes a detailed and first-person perspective of participants, focusing on their direct experiences without interpretation or theoretical imposition.

To enhance methodological rigor and provide a more holistic understanding of the internalization process, this study also incorporates data triangulation through non-participant classroom observations and a focus group discussion (FGD). The integration of multiple data sources strengthens the depth, credibility, and contextual richness of the findings, allowing the researcher to examine not only students' narrated experiences but also their observable interactions and shared reflections within peer settings.

Participants

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those included had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. A total of 12 students from SMAN 2 Plus Panyabungan participated, with an equal gender distribution of 6 male and 6 female students. The participants were aged between 16 and 18 years and were enrolled in the Islamic education subject at the school. To be included in the study, participants were required to have actively engaged in the Islamic education curriculum and to have had exposure to teachings on Islamic character values, particularly humility (Hillman & Radel, 2018; Migdal, 2018). Exclusion criteria included students who had not participated in the Islamic education subject for a full academic year, as their experiences would not be sufficiently comprehensive. The participants' varied experiences and backgrounds provided a rich understanding of the subject matter, contributing to the depth of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were conducted face-to-face with each participant. The interviews aimed to elicit personal narratives about the participants' experiences with the internalization of Islamic character values, focusing on humility. The interview protocol was designed to explore how students perceived and applied the teachings of humility in their daily lives, as well as the influence of their teachers and peers. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in a private, comfortable setting within the school, ensuring that participants felt at ease and able to speak openly (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Iosifides, 2016). The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To maintain consistency, the interview questions followed a set of open-ended prompts that encouraged detailed and reflective responses. The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language, with follow-up questions posed to clarify and explore deeper aspects of the participants' experiences.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique that is widely employed in phenomenological research. The process involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Daly, 2007; Longhofer et al., 2012). Each transcript was read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences shared by the participants. Themes related to the internalization of humility and its manifestation in students' lives were identified and organized into categories. Thematic analysis was used to draw out essential meanings and insights from the data, allowing for an understanding of how humility is understood and practiced by the students in the context of Islamic education. NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and managing the data, but the focus remained on the manual, interpretive process of analyzing the participants' experiences.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Consent forms were provided to the participants and their parents or guardians, as some participants were minors. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and confidentiality was guaranteed. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used in all transcriptions and reports (Fife, 2020; Kawamura, 2020). The study adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the relevant institutional ethics committee. Additionally, the participants' responses were kept confidential, and all data were stored securely in compliance with ethical research practices.

RESULTS

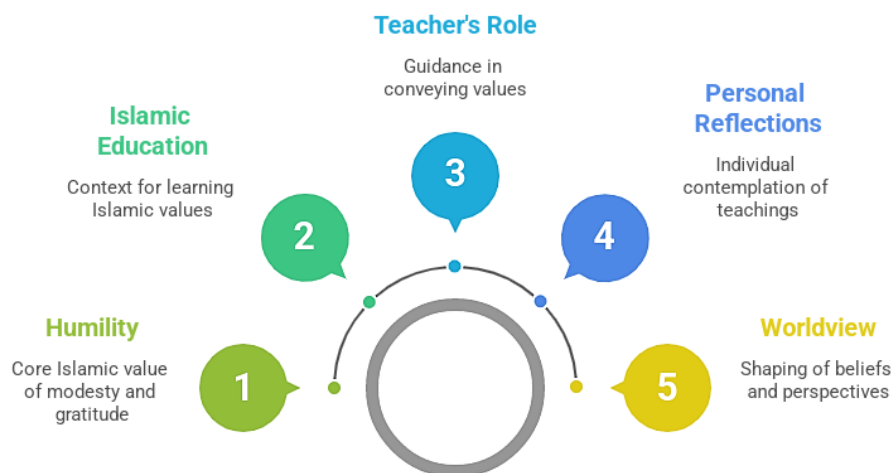
Internalization of Islamic Character Values through Islamic Education

The internalization of Islamic character values in the context of Islamic education was the central theme that emerged from the interviews. The students described their experiences of learning about Islamic values, particularly those related to humility, during their Islamic education lessons. One participant, Ayu, emphasized how the lessons on humility in Islam were embedded in the teaching process:

"In our Islamic education classes, the teacher always tells us that humility is a virtue, but it's not just about being humble in front of others. It is about understanding that everything we have is a gift from Allah, and that makes us humble in our daily lives."

This quote highlights how the value of humility was conveyed not just as a theoretical concept but as an intrinsic part of their worldview. The process of internalization was described as ongoing, deeply personal, and influenced by the personal reflections students had on the teachings they received.

Internalization of Islamic Character Values



The Role of Teachers in Shaping Humility

Another significant theme was the role of teachers in shaping students' understanding of humility. The students acknowledged that teachers played a crucial role not only in imparting knowledge but also in modeling humility through their actions. Hasan, a student participant, shared:

"Our teacher is very humble. She never raises her voice, and she always listens to what we have to say, even when we make mistakes. I think that is how we learn humility, by seeing her example."

Teachers were seen as role models whose actions reinforced the teachings in the classroom. The embodiment of humility by teachers was seen as crucial for helping students internalize these values authentically. This experience was echoed by other students, who indicated that the teachers' humility made the value more relatable and accessible.

Challenges in Understanding and Internalizing Islamic Values

Despite the positive experiences, several students also highlighted challenges in fully internalizing the values of humility. One participant, Fina, mentioned the difficulty of practicing humility in a competitive academic environment:

"It's hard to always be humble when we are constantly competing with others for grades. Sometimes, I feel like I have to show off to prove I am capable."

This statement reflects the tension that some students felt between the Islamic values of humility and the competitive nature of school life. The competition among peers was identified as a significant barrier to practicing humility in daily interactions. However, Fina also noted that, over time, she was learning to balance her academic aspirations with the teachings she received in Islamic education classes.

Reflection on Humility as a Lifelong Practice

The final theme that emerged was the students' reflections on humility as a lifelong practice that transcends academic settings. Several students, like Rizki, expressed a deep understanding that humility is not merely about behavior but about internalizing a mindset that aligns with Islamic teachings. Rizki remarked:

"I now realize that humility is not just about how you act around others, but it is about being sincere in everything you do. It's a way of living, not just a class lesson."

This reflection underscores the realization among students that humility, as taught in Islamic education, is an ongoing personal journey that extends beyond the classroom. It suggests that the internalization of these values will continue to evolve as the students grow older and engage with different life contexts.

In summary, the findings suggest that the internalization of Islamic values, particularly humility, is a multi-faceted process influenced by classroom teachings, the role of teachers as models, and personal reflections. The students' experiences indicate that while they perceive the values as meaningful and transformative, challenges remain in fully embracing these principles, especially in a competitive academic environment. Nonetheless, the overarching sentiment is that the values of humility taught in Islamic education are deeply ingrained and will continue to shape their character in the long term.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Key Findings

This study explored how students internalize Islamic character values, specifically humility, through Islamic education. The findings reveal that students' experiences of internalizing humility are deeply influenced by their interactions with teachers, their personal reflections on Islamic teachings, and the challenges they face in a competitive academic environment. These experiences highlight how humility is not merely a behavioral trait but an integral aspect of students' evolving identity, shaped by both religious education and broader social contexts.

Contribution to the Research Questions

The study's findings provide valuable insights into the process of internalizing Islamic values, particularly humility, and offer answers to the primary research question about how students experience and apply these values. By focusing on the lived experiences of students, this research

contributes to a deeper understanding of the personal, subjective nature of character education in Islamic settings. The experiences shared by the participants show that humility is not only taught through formal instruction but also through the modeling of behaviors by teachers and the gradual internalization of values over time (Nuzul, 2021; Prasetyo & Muhsin, 2023). These insights challenge previous research that primarily focused on observable behaviors and highlight the need for more holistic approaches that take into account the complexity of students' internalization processes.

Relation to Existing Literature and Theories

The findings align with existing literature on character education in Islamic settings, where humility is seen as a key virtue that students are expected to internalize. Studies by authors like Al-Hassan (2017) and Mahmud et al. (2020) have emphasized the importance of teachers as role models in the moral and character development of students. This study supports their findings by demonstrating how students' perceptions of humility are significantly influenced by the behavior of their educators. However, unlike much of the existing literature, which often adopts a more quantitative approach, this research brings to light the deeply personal and subjective experiences of students, which have often been overlooked (Supatminingsih et al., 2025; "The Role of Teachers and Parents in Formation of Children's Character in Schools: A Study in Southeast Sulawesi, Islamic Family Law Perspective," 2025). The study also contributes to the broader discourse on the role of religion in education, reinforcing theories of value internalization that suggest character development is a continuous, evolving process, shaped by both formal education and personal reflections (Noddings, 2013). Furthermore, the challenges identified by students in reconciling humility with competitive academic environments provide a new perspective on the complexities involved in character education, an issue that has been less explored in prior studies.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have significant implications for both educational practice and theoretical understanding of character education in Islamic contexts. The research highlights the importance of teachers as role models in shaping students' internalization of Islamic values, particularly humility. This emphasizes the need for educators to be conscious of how their behaviors, attitudes, and teaching methods impact students' character development (Liandy & Amir, 2025; Sinha et al., 2021). From a practical perspective, schools may consider integrating more reflective and personal approaches to teaching humility, encouraging students not only to learn about humility but also to experience it in a supportive, role-modeling environment. The implications also extend to the broader educational field, where the internalization of values like humility is not just about compliance with rules but about fostering deeper moral and ethical growth. These findings suggest that character education programs should focus more on the experiential and reflective aspects of learning, rather than simply transmitting knowledge, to help students develop a more meaningful understanding of values like humility.

Limitations of the Study

While the findings offer valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in a specific educational context, at SMAN 2 Plus Panyabungan, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other schools or cultural settings. The small sample size of 12 students, while providing in-depth insights into their experiences, may not fully represent the diversity of experiences that students in other schools or regions might have. Additionally, the study relied solely on interviews as the method of data collection, which, although effective for capturing personal experiences, may not account for the full range of influences that shape students' understanding of humility, such as family dynamics or broader societal norms (Judd et al., 2023; Musarrofa & Rohman, 2023). Future research could expand the sample size, include different school settings, and incorporate other data collection methods, such as observation or focus groups, to provide a more comprehensive view of the internalization process.

Prospective Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study open several avenues for future research in the field of Islamic character education and phenomenology (Han & Martin, 2025). One potential direction is to explore

how the internalization of humility in students evolves over time, particularly in relation to changes in their academic and social experiences. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how students' understanding and application of humility shift as they progress through their education. Additionally, future studies could explore the role of family, community, and peer influences in shaping students' internalization of Islamic values (Gago Rodríguez et al., 2024). By expanding the scope to include multiple social contexts, researchers could better understand the broader cultural and societal factors that contribute to the development of character in young people. Furthermore, investigating the effectiveness of various teaching methods, such as experiential learning or service-based education, could enhance the understanding of how Islamic values like humility are best cultivated in students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how students internalize Islamic character values, particularly humility, within the context of Islamic education at SMAN 2 Plus Panyabungan. The findings indicate that the internalization of humility is not merely the result of formal instruction, but emerges through three interconnected processes: teachers' embodied role modeling, students' reflective engagement with Islamic teachings, and their negotiation of humility within competitive academic and peer environments. These findings highlight that humility develops as a lived moral disposition shaped through relational interaction, reflective meaning-making, and consistent experiential reinforcement. The study contributes to the literature by moving beyond outcome-based evaluations of character education and offering an experiential understanding of how humility becomes integrated into students' identities. By foregrounding students' subjective narratives, this research demonstrates that effective character education must address not only cognitive understanding but also emotional awareness, self-reflection, and social practice. Beyond its theoretical contribution, this study offers important implications for educational policy and practice. First, curriculum developers should integrate structured reflective activities—such as guided self-assessment journals, dialogical classroom discussions, and moral case analysis—to facilitate deeper personal engagement with Islamic values. Second, teacher professional development programs should emphasize the importance of value embodiment, equipping educators to model humility consistently in classroom interactions, feedback practices, and conflict resolution. Third, schools should cultivate supportive learning environments that balance academic competition with collaborative and character-oriented activities, ensuring that humility is reinforced through peer interaction rather than undermined by performance pressures. At the policy level, character education frameworks in Islamic and public schools should move beyond declarative value statements toward experiential and relational pedagogical models. Educational stakeholders may consider embedding humility indicators within holistic student development assessments that evaluate reflective capacity, respectful communication, and ethical decision-making alongside academic performance. Such policy adjustments would help ensure that humility is cultivated as an internalized virtue rather than merely an externally observed behavior. Future research may extend this study by examining the longitudinal impact of reflective and relational pedagogical strategies on character development, as well as by exploring the complementary roles of family, community, and digital environments in shaping the internalization of Islamic values. Expanding inquiry into these broader ecological influences will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how humility and other virtues are sustainably developed in young individuals.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study.

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