

**CHARACTER EDUCATION BASED ON RELIGIOUS VALUES: THE CASE OF  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN PALU, INDONESIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this study is to find out the effectiveness of character education implementation through an extra time religion learning program at elementary schools in Palu city, Indonesia. This study used a qualitative case study approach. There were fifteen government elementary schools in Palu city, Indonesia was involved. Data were gathered through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with the school principals and religious teachers. In addition, written documents related to religious subjects were also analyzed to get insights describing the teaching and learning process. The results show that education character has successfully been implemented through the extra religion time teaching program. In addition, students from different religious backgrounds increased their religiosity and awareness of the importance of living in harmony in a religious and culturally diverse environment.*

**KEYWORDS:** Character education, religious values, elementary level. Indonesia

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**INTRODUCTION**

Crisis in characters has implications on the young generation in social and national aspects (Lynch et al., 1997). The consequences on the social dimension cause social problems such as the use of narcotics, brawls, promiscuity and free sex, criminal acts of violence, radicalism, and others. Meanwhile, the implication on the national dimension can reduce a sense of social solidarity, social cohesion, unity, national commitment, and nationalism (Smith & Sorrell, 2014).

Among the factors that influence the decline in the value of the youngsters' character are the weak implementation of the nation's religious, moral, and cultural values in schools' curriculum.

This drives the importance of articulating religious values as the basis for character education in the last decades in basic education in all local governments.

In Indonesia, the design of character education at the elementary school level is usually built from core ethical values derived from religious values to form a strong character for the younger generation. Character education is used as a program to realize the vision of national and regional development, namely to create a society with noble character, morality, ethics, culture, and civility (Erihadiana, 2019). The values of education character are usually built based on the Five Principles of the Indonesian State or *Pancasila* philosophy. Character education based on religious values is needed to develop spiritual and social attitudes, morals and morals, personality, togetherness, unity, nationalism, and strong nationalism (Warlim et al., 2021).

Schools are considered as an effective institution for instilling students' character values based on religious teachings. The development of character education in schools is also considered as an important strategy to be carried out through approaches such as self-development programs, integration in learning subjects and habituation processes, as well as internalizing good values through cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Sriyanto et al., 2018). Character education based on religious values has been implemented in several schools in Indonesia, including elementary schools in Palu City. The implementation of the character education based on religious values is a manifestation of the vision of Palu City. The vision of the city is "the realization of smart millennial generation based on local culture and religious spirituality".

According to Nurafiati et al., (2021), strengthening character education based on religious values in all elementary schools is carried out for three main reasons: *First*, the declining of character (noble character) among students. *Second*, the disappearance of the noble values of the nation's culture as the consequence of globalization. *Third* is the need for new policies, systems, and patterns to build students' character education models based on religious values and local wisdom.

The three reasons for the importance of strengthening character education based on religious values in Palu city were formulated in a program called "cultured Thursday" and "Praying Friday". The two programs were designed to build religious character education at the elementary school level. It is expected to produce intelligent, characterized, and cultured students who have strong faith and piety. However, even though the program has been implemented for nearly five years, no studies have been carried out to understand the effectiveness of the program and how the program affects the elementary students' character and religiosity. This study, therefore, was conducted to provide insight both for academia and the local government regarding the effectiveness of the program.

This study is also considered relevant to examine and describe the implementation of a character education building program based on religious values. The result of this study is expected to be used for the city education character development in the future. This study is also intended to provide best practices for other local governments in implementing similar initiatives in Indonesia or other similar characteristics countries.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Education Character

The term character education has been introduced since the 1990s. Thomas Lickona (1993) is considered to be his bearer, especially when he wrote a book entitled. "*The Return of Character Education*", then followed by the book "*Educating for Character: How Our Scholl Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*". In his book, Lickona made the Western world aware of the importance of character education. In Indonesia, the term character education was introduced around the 2000s. Implicitly, it is emphasized in the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) of national education of 2005-2025, which places character education as the basis for realizing the vision of Indonesia national development, namely "creating a society with noble character, morals, ethics, culture, and civility based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution Law of the Republic of Indonesia" (Hartono et al., 2018).

In the National Action Plan for Character Education, it is stated that character education is an essential value education which also include moral education, and character-building which aims to develop the ability of students to make good and bad decisions, maintain what is good and realize that goodness in their life. On that basis, character education is a process of inculcating habits (*habituations*) about good things so that students become aware of good and bad, right and wrong, and able to reflect them in their behavior (Adawiah, 2018).

Character education is an effort to educate children so that they can make wise decisions and practice them in everyday life so that they can make a positive contribution to their environment (Khaidir & Suud, 2020). Another definition from Amini et al., (2017) character education is defined as a system of teaching character values to students, including components of awareness, understanding, concern, and a high commitment to implementing these values, both towards God Almighty, oneself, and others. The environment, society, and the nation as a whole become perfect human beings according to their nature.

Furthermore, Kohlberg (1975) asserts that character education in principle has the same essence as moral education and moral education. The goal is to shape the child's personality to become

a good human being, citizen, and citizen. Therefore, the nature of character education in the context of education in Indonesia is value education, moral education, morals, and character that are sourced from the noble values of the nation's culture, religion, and state philosophy.

Character education is also understood as a systematic effort to instill and simultaneously develop consistently and continuously character qualities based on religious values, culture, and state philosophy which are internalized at home, at school, and in the community in life (Halstead, 1994). Character education has become an effort to guide human behavior or students towards the values of life comprehensively. The action provides a way to appreciate students' perceptions and personal values at home, at school, and in the broader community.

Thomas Lickona (1993), the originator of character education, reinforces the essence of character education as an effort to shape the human personality through the process of knowing the good, loving the good, and acting the good. Therefore, the process of character education involves three domains, namely: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

Moral knowing includes being morally aware, knowing moral values, perspectives, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge (Sie, 2014). Moral feeling includes awareness of conscience, self-esteem, empathy, loving-kindness, self-control, and humility. Finally, moral action includes competence, goodwill, and habits. In Lickona's (1993) view, character education will not be effective without involving these three domains.

The formation of character within the individual is a function of the full potential of the individual human (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) in the context of lifelong socio-cultural interactions. Therefore, character education is expected to produce human characters. Here there are three interrelated institutions, namely the family, school, and community. The three give each other a role to give birth to humans or generations of noble character.

### **The Concept of Religious Values in Character Education**

A character is a form of individual adaptation to values through a process of transformation and internalization. Among these values are religious values and cultural values. However, religion becomes a strong foundation of values, as well as character values. Religion contains teachings about various noble and noble values for humans to achieve human dignity and culture (Sukardi, 2016). Religious values greatly influence social life because religion contains a curative element to social pathology.

Religion contains spiritual-spiritual values as the basic needs of human life naturally (Chandler et al., 1992). The spiritual-spiritual values of faith are manifested in individual perspectives and behavior towards objects based on the spirit of religion. Access to sources of religious values will be able to maximize character education efforts to create future generations who have humanist and religious personalities.

Without a foundation of religious, spiritual values, humans cannot achieve a balance between two opposing forces, are good and evil, and based on the size or standard of religious teachings (Hill et al., 2000). At the level of daily practice, these religious values are manifested in the form of everyday attitudes and behaviors that are faithful, do good deeds, and have noble character. This shows that religion has a big role in shaping human character. In religious teachings, there are many suggestions to do good behavior and leave everything that is not good or contrary to morals. Thus, religion has a very close level of connectivity with character education. Character education based on religious values has a strategic meaning and function to trans-internalize character values originating from religious teachings in the dialectical context of human life.

Religious values are the basis for noble values that are used as guidelines for shaping human character, which will be manifested in attitudes and behavior in life in accordance with God's rules (Huda et al., 2019). This is intended to achieve safety, welfare, and happiness in human life, both in the world and in the hereafter. Thus, the manifestation of religious values in life is actually a reflection of the inherent quality of human religiosity, wherein the perspective of Islam can be seen in the three main elements of value, namely *aqidah* (faith), *worship* (charity), and noble character (charity).

There are two dimensions of religious values that must be the basis for character education values: *ilahiah* and *insaniah* values (Anwar, 2010). The term *ilahiah* value is a dimension of value related to the vertical relationship between humans and God or their creator. In contrast, *insaniah* value is a dimension of value related to human relations with one another. The *ilahiah* values, for example, consist of the values of faith, Islam, Ihsan, piety, sincerity, trustworthiness, gratitude, patience, and on. At the same time, *insaniah* values consist of brotherhood, solidarity, cooperation, empathy, sympathy, tolerance, humility, good prejudice, trustworthiness, equality, tolerance, justice, etc.

Al-Syaibani is of one the view that considers character development from the perspective of Islamic education. It is developed inseparable in the context of three religious values, namely: divine values (*ilāhiyah*), human value (*insāniyah*), and natural value (*‘ālamiah*) interactively, dynamically, integratively and harmoniously into an ideal life for human civilization (Wilson

& Hollensen, 2013). The form of religious values above is a reflection of the five dimensions of religiosity, namely: a. Religious belief b. Religious practice; c. Religious feeling; d. Spiritual knowledge; dan e. Religious effect.

The overall dimensions of religion stated above show that religion is based on a belief system (aqidah) which contains the oneness of Allah SWT as the main source of life values for humans and the universe. Another source is morality, which is a manifestation of the dimension of faith and the basis for developing character values. Religion includes the totality of human attitudes and behavior in daily life based on the values of *ilahiyyah*. All attitudes and behavior are based on faith and are manifested in the form of character, both vertically to God and horizontally among humans and their natural environment.

In the context of the education unit, religion becomes a source of values shown by students in schools as a reflection of attitudes and behavior to believe, understand, appreciate, and practice their religious teachings. Educational programs in schools should be designed in a context that is never value-free, either through intra-curricular or extracurricular programs. Furthermore, educational interventions given to students must implicitly contain the transmission of religious values held by students. Therefore, education in schools must always teach values, especially religious values.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in 15 government elementary schools in Palu city, Indonesia. The selection of elementary education (SD) as the object of this research was due to the local government's vision of human resource development, which emphasizes the realization of the millennial generation who are intelligent, cultured, and has a character based on faith and piety. The number of elementary schools in Palu city is 158 schools consisting of 131 public elementary schools and 27 private elementary schools. However, the object of this research is 15 public elementary schools. Data were collected through Focus Group interviews, in-depth interviews, direct observation, and written material.

This study uses a qualitative approach (Nurdin, 2018; Yin, 2011) investigating the implementation of character education programs at elementary schools. Data were collected through Focus Group interviews, in-depth interviews, direct observation. Written materials from the elementary schools were also used to analyze the case (Nurdin, 2019). Data analysis consists of several procedures, which include reduction and verification techniques with various data sources (Nurdin et al., 2018). The reduced data is then analyzed, reflecting on theoretical concepts used in this study. The results were presented based on thematic issues found in the

data (Rusli & Nurdin, 2021), which show the insight of the study relating education character based on religious teaching within the elementary schools.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Application of Religious Value-Based Character Education**

Character education based on religious values in Palu City elementary schools embodies the Palu Government's vision and mission, which aims to create a cultured and moderated society based on faith and piety. Therefore, the implementation of character education based on religious values at the State Elementary Schools level in Palu is carried out in two main programs: providing additional hours of religious learning for students and praying and reciting Friday prayers.

The strengthening of the character values of the students includes the provision of educational, learning, and experience programs that are oriented towards strengthening the components of knowledge, awareness or willingness, and actions to carry out religion according to God's blessing. In addition, character education includes increasing the awareness of respect to friends, environment, and nationality through the integration of religion in daily life (Danesh, 2008).

An extra hour religion learning program to provide was given to all students from various religious backgrounds. In this case, additional religious lessons were given based on the religion of each student starting from grade fifth of the Elementary Schools in Palu City. This extra hour program of religious lessons aims to strengthen the inculcation of faith and piety of the students as one of the main characters based on religious values. The strategy increased the students' religious behavior (*Akhlak*) because they spend more time engaging in religious teaching and learning programs (Halim Tamuri, 2007).

Implementatively, the program of additional hours of religious lessons was carried out after regular learning or outside of curricular learning. We found that Outlines of Learning Programs (GBPP) document for the additional hours of religious learning for elementary schools in Palu City was carried out three times a week with ninety minutes for each meeting. The teaching and learning load can be seen in the following table 1:

**Table 1.** Description of Religious Extra Hours Learning in Primary Schools

The learning was carried out 30 weeks for one year
The meeting was between fifteen to sixteen weeks every semester
Study hours for one week was six hours of learning with a duration of one to two hour of learning in every meeting
Study hours for one meeting consist of two learning hours or 2x45 minutes

The learning process was carried out by independently selected teachers based on the number of teacher needs referring to the number of students based on their respective religions. A total of 331 teachers were recruited, consisting of 296 Islamic religion teachers, 30 Christian protestant teachers, two Catholic teachers, 2 two Hindu religion teachers, and one teacher for Buddhists. The content of Islamic religious learning was related to five main materials, namely, strengthening the reading and writing of the Qur'an, guiding the practice of worship, moral development, and memorizing short Qur'an verses. The complete learning Islamic teaching content can be seen in the following table 2:

**Table 2.** Description of the learning contents of the Islamic religion

No.	Learning materials	Sub Learning Materials
1.	<i>Rubaiyat</i> material (basic learning to read the Qur'an)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recognize hijaiyah letters</li> <li>2. Reading the word</li> <li>3. Reading sentences</li> <li>4. Reading the Qur'an Juz 30</li> </ol>
2.	Worship practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Guidance on the procedures for doing Thaharah</li> <li>2. Guidance on how to pray</li> </ol>
3.	Morals/ character	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adab and daily prayers</li> <li>2. Exemplary stories</li> </ol>
4.	<i>Tahfidz</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Memorizing short Qur'an verses</li> </ol>
5.	<i>Kitabah</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write single Arabic letters</li> <li>2. Write words and sentences</li> </ol>



The learning content for non-Muslim religions was related the main materials such as strengthening reading of the holy book, guiding the practice of worship, and character building. The complete learning content for non-Islamic students can be seen in the following table 3:

**Table 3.** Description of the learning contents of Non-Islamic learning materials

No.	Learning materials	Sub Learning Materials
1.	Religious scripture study	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction to the main contents of the scriptures</li> <li>2. Read and study the meaning of the scriptures</li> </ol>
2.	Worship practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Guidance on how to worship</li> <li>2. Guidance on religious ceremony procedures</li> </ol>
3.	Character / morals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Good manners and daily prayers</li> <li>2. Exemplary stories</li> </ol>

The implications of this religious extra hour learning program show that the religious supplementary learning program has a positive impact in providing stimulants to students and parents, encouraging their children to learn to read and write the Qur'an and study religion (Zurqoni et al., 2018). There were many Muslim students who had not been able to read the Qur'an before the religion extra hours study program was implemented. Likewise, non-Muslim students could not read the holy books of their religions, such as Christian, Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist students. They also did not know how to worship correctly based on their respective religions and also did not have a religious character based on their belief systems. However, after the extra hour program was implemented, the situation improved, and the students became more religious. The program also provided reinforcement and complemented the shortcomings of religious study hours in the morning and became a new learning medium for students who had not been able to read their holy books (Sutejo et al., 2021).

The conclusion of the results of focus group discussion with school principals and religious teachers can be seen in the following table 4:

**Table 4.** Description of focus group discussion results

No.	In-depth Questions	Informant Response
1.	In your opinion, do the additional religious learning programs positively impact the religious development of the students?	It has a very positive impact and great benefits to increase students' religious passion, especially in reading and writing the Koran and other religious scriptures for non-Muslims.
2.	What are the positive impacts of this additional religious learning program?	A very good impact in increasing the ability to read the tuls al-Qur'an for Muslim students and the holy books of non-Muslim religions for non-Muslim students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help cover/overcome the lack of hours of religious learning in the morning.</li> <li>- Increase religious knowledge, knowledge, and ability to read and write the Koran, worship practices, and morals.</li> <li>- Students have positive activities and avoid activities that are out of control in their social environment.</li> </ul>
3.	In your opinion, what are the religious values formed from the implementation of additional religious learning programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values of loving religion and religious scriptures.</li> <li>- Values of tolerance, respect, respect, and understanding of religious differences. This value can be built especially at the time of the program takhtim.</li> <li>- Character values are obedient and diligent in studying, worshiping, and reading the holy book of their religion.</li> </ul>
4.	What are the obstacles you face in implementing the program of additional hours of religious learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Obstacles in the presence and support of parents, but with a persuasive approach with parents, finally, it can work well with parental support.</li> </ul>
5.	What are your suggestions regarding this program?	This program is good and very positive and useful, so it should be continued continuously.

From the focus group discussion above, it can be concluded that religious values education basically strengthens students' religious values (Gross & Rutland, 2021). The religious values

include the students' belief in religion and the holy book, increasing faith, and piety, obeying worship, behaving with noble character, and respecting each other among fellow believers. In particular, the values of tolerance and mutual understanding and acceptance of differences were reflected in activities *takhtim* learning that was carried out together with all religions believers. In this activity, they mingle with each other both during practice and at the peak of the parade of religious activities.

The *takhtim* activity brings together all students who have been given the religious learning extension program. There was something interesting during the preparation for the exercise and the implementation of religious activities. They were both present to practice reading the holy books of their respective religions. At that time, their religious values were formed where students could hear, see, and finally understand the procedures of religions in reading books and praying. The process becomes a habituation medium to get to know each other and the experience of hearing and seeing, which eventually becomes mutual understanding. One activity to create togetherness and mutual respect among different religious believers is depicted in the following picture 1.



**Picture 1.** The religious parade of elementary school students

### **Character building based on religious values**

The building of students' character based on religious values in elementary schools in Indonesia is considered relevant as a paradigmatic perspective in designing the concept and implementation of character education. According to religious teachings, religious values form the basis of students' character, which respect differences in beliefs, culture, ethnicity, and nationality. The character values are reflected in the students' attitudes, feelings, words, manners, and actions (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

Religious values become the basis of character education consisting of studies of religious values, socio-cultural norms of society (Statham & Tillie, 2016). They are grouped into five main values: values of human behavior in relation to God almighty, oneself, fellow human beings, and the environment and nationality. The main values referred to above are described as follows:

1. Character values in relation to God, a personality manifested in thoughts, attitudes, and behavior based on divine values and/or religious teachings.
2. Character values in relation to themselves are personalities that are manifested in the form of attitudes and behaviors, including honesty, responsibility, healthy lifestyle, discipline, hard work, self-confidence, entrepreneurial spirit, independence, curiosity, love of science, critical thinking.
3. Character values in relation to others are personalities that are manifested in the form of attitudes and behaviors, including understanding the rights and obligations of self and others, obeying social rules/norms, respecting the work and achievements of others, being polite and democratic.
4. The value of character in relation to the environment is a personality manifested in attitudes and behavior that cares for society and the environment.
5. The value of national character, personality embodied in the form of nationalist attitudes and behavior, respecting diversity.

Based on the five main values above, the Indonesia Ministry of National Education has identified eighteen character values that become the basis for character education at elementary schools, as shown in Table 5 below:

**Table 5.** Religion-based character values

No.	Character Value	Description			
1.	Religious	Obedient attitudes and behavior in carrying out the teachings of the religion they adhere to, being tolerant of the implementation of worship of other religions, and living in harmony with followers of other religions.			
2.	Honest	Behavior that is based on trying to make himself a person who can always be trusted in words, actions, and work.			
3.	Tolerance	Attitudes and actions that respect differences in religion ethnicity, ethnicity, opinions, attitudes, and actions of others who are different from themselves.			
4.	Discipline	Actions that show orderly behavior and comply with various rules and regulations.			
5.	Hard work	Behavior that shows genuine effort in overcoming various learning and task barriers and completing tasks as well as possible.			
6.	Creativity	Creativity Thinking and doing something to produce a new way or result from something you already have. Independent Attitudes and behaviors that are not easy to depend on others to complete tasks.			
7.	independent	attitudes and behaviors that do not easily depend on others to complete tasks.			
8.	Democratic	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Attitudes and actions always seek to know more deeply and broadly from something learned, seen, and heard.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Attitudes and actions always seek to know more deeply and broadly from something learned, seen, and heard.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Attitudes, words, and actions cause other people to feel happy and secure in their presence.</td> </tr> </table>	Attitudes and actions always seek to know more deeply and broadly from something learned, seen, and heard.	Attitudes and actions always seek to know more deeply and broadly from something learned, seen, and heard.	Attitudes, words, and actions cause other people to feel happy and secure in their presence.
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Attitudes, words, and actions cause other people to feel happy and secure in their presence.					

9.	Curiosity	Attitudes and actions always seek to know more deeply and broadly from something learned, seen, and heard. Attitudes and actions always seek to know more deeply and broadly from something learned, seen, and heard. Attitudes, words, and actions cause other people to feel happy and secure in their presence.
10.	Love of peace	Attitudes, words, and actions cause others to feel happy and secure in their presence.

Among the various values developed, the implementation can start from values that are essential, simple, and easy to implement in accordance with the conditions of each school, namely piety, clean, neat, comfortable, disciplined, polite, and courteous. According to Arif Rahman Hakim, in Anas Salahudin, character education is oriented towards fulfilling the five personality characteristics: pious, mature personality, up-to-date knowledge and achievement, a sense of nationality, and a sense of global perspective. Furthermore, Anas Salahudin said that students' character is at least characterized by spiritual awareness, moral integration, holistic thinking skills, open attitude, courtesy, and caring. The character values above, in essence, aim to form a generation of a nation that is tough, competitive, has a noble character, has morals, is tolerant, works together, has an independent spirit, is patriotic, entrepreneurial, develops dynamically, oriented to science and technology, all of which are inspired by faith and piety that we have to God and based on Pancasila.

## CONCLUSION

To strengthen character education in elementary schools in Palu city Indonesia, the local government builds religious values include tolerance behavior, kinship, and cooperation in community life. Other values include respect to cultural diversity, ethnic and traditions variations. The city is rich with various values of wisdom based on faith and piety. The provision of additional hours of integrated religious learning has increased students' awareness of the benefits of living in differences. The strategy for implementing character education based on religious values developed by the local government education department is relevant to the concept of character building and internalization of religious and national values in daily life.

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