
Instilling Islamic Character through Social Studies Learning in Lower Grades at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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Abstract: Basic education is a crucial phase in shaping children's basic character. In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Social Studies (IPS) learning is not only interpreted as the transfer of knowledge about the social environment, but also as a medium for internalizing Islamic values. This study aims to describe the forms of Islamic character building carried out in lower grade IPS learning and analyze its implications for students' personalities. The research uses a qualitative case study approach. The subjects of this study are classroom teachers and lower grade students. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results show that Islamic character building in social studies learning is carried out through three dimensions: first, ritual habits (memorizing daily prayers); second, material integration (connecting social concepts with the values of monotheism and fiqh); third, interactive habits (enforcing social manners and Islamic brotherhood). This study concludes that consistent habit formation by teachers in the classroom during social studies learning is able to shape students' understanding that social sciences are part of worship. Fourth, Transcendence of Social Studies Learning, Teachers succeeded in integrating the values of tawhid and fiqh muamalah into the real context of the classroom, thereby forming an Islamic and respectful classroom culture.

Keywords: Habituation, Islamic Character, Social Studies, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

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Introduction

Basic education is a crucial foundation in shaping the character of a nation. At this level, children not only develop their cognitive potential, but also form basic values and personalities that will remain with them into adulthood. In the context of education in Indonesia, particularly in Islamic educational institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, the goal of education is not only to produce a generation that is intellectually intelligent, but also to have a strong faith and noble character as formulated in the objectives of National Education (Law of the Republic of Indonesia, 2003).

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has distinctive characteristics as an educational institution that integrates the national curriculum with the religious curriculum. This is in line with the Islamic view that does not separate general knowledge from religious knowledge. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (2001), in his work on the Islamization of knowledge, emphasizes that knowledge must be viewed as a whole, in which social sciences and natural sciences cannot be separated from revelatory values. This concept forms the philosophical basis for the importance of integrating Islamic values into all subjects taught in MI, including Social Sciences (IPS).

Social Studies (IPS) in lower grades (grades II and III) essentially studies social phenomena that are closely related to students' lives, such as family, school, community, work, and needs (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). The pragmatic and social nature of IPS material makes it a very potential medium for character building. Students aged 7–9 years are in the concrete operational stage according to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Santrock, 2014). At this stage, children

tend to imitate adult behavior and easily form habits. Therefore, instilling Islamic character through SSE learning at an early age will be very effective if done consistently and repeatedly.

Previous studies have discussed the integration of religious values in education, which is an important basis for this study. Fajriyah and Kholili (2019), for example, in their study on the internalization of Islamic values in social studies learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, found that the internalization process was carried out through the insertion of verses from the Qur'an and the teacher's exemplary methods. The results of this study show that students are able to understand social studies concepts and relate them to Islamic values. However, the focus of this study still tends to be on the cognitive realm or theoretical understanding, leaving a gap regarding behavioral habituation strategies to automatically shape the character of lower grade students who are in the concrete operational stage.

Furthermore, Rahmawati (2021) in her research on character building through literacy activities in elementary schools proved that consistent habits such as reading every morning can shape discipline and responsibility. Although effective, the study emphasized character building through extracurricular activities or general school programs, rather than through direct integration into intracurricular subjects. There is a gap in research on how Islamic character building is carried out simultaneously and specifically in social studies instruction in madrasahs. Considering that lower grade social studies material is heavily focused on social interaction and the environment, it is important to examine character building not only in specific events, but also embedded in students' social thinking during the learning process.

On the other hand, Saputra (2020) examined the role of teachers as role models in instilling character values in Islamic elementary schools. The results show that teachers with strong character will be imitated by students. However, this study is macro in nature and generally applies to all subjects without specifying the context of social studies learning in lower grades. In fact, social studies learning has unique material characteristics regarding the study of society and the environment of time and place that require specific habituation strategies. The lack of studies detailing the link between Islamic character and concrete social material in lower grades indicates the need for further research. Therefore, research entitled Islamic Character Habituation through Lower Grade Social Studies Learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is very important to fill this gap.

Research conducted by Kurniawan (2019) shows that many social studies teachers in elementary schools are still less than optimal in instilling moral values because they are constrained by administrative burdens and a dense curriculum. In addition, research by Utami (2021) reveals that the integration of Islamic values in learning is often only supplementary, such as adding prayers at the beginning of lessons, without touching on the aspect of internalizing values in the material and classroom interactions.

In fact, the habit-forming approach is a character-building strategy that is highly recommended in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) educated his companions not only through lectures, but also through example and habit formation. In the context of modern education, Daradjat (2014) emphasizes that moral education is not sufficient with cognitive teaching alone, but requires real practice and habituation so that these values become spontaneous attitudes in children.

Based on the description of the research gap above, the purpose of this study is to describe the forms of Islamic character building applied by teachers in social studies learning in lower grades of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. In addition, this study also aims to analyze the process of integrating Islamic character values into social studies material in accordance with the cognitive development stage of students, as well as to determine the effectiveness of these habit formation strategies on changes in students' social behavior in the madrasah environment and daily life

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a instrument case study design. This approach was chosen because the researcher intended to conduct an intensive, in-depth, and comprehensive study of the phenomenon of Islamic character building in social studies learning in a limited context, namely in lower grades of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The case study design is considered appropriate for answering the research questions of how and why an accustomization program works, as well as how interactions between actors in the classroom influence the process of internalizing these values (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted at MI Ihyauddin, an Islamic elementary school in Lamongan Regency. The location was chosen purposively because the school has an A accreditation profile and has implemented a curriculum that integrates Islamic values into all subjects, including social studies.

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling techniques. Participants consisted of two classroom teachers (Grade II and III) who taught social studies, as well as 55 students. Data were collected through three main techniques, namely Participant observation, In-Depth Interview and documentation. Data validity is ensured through validity checks using source triangulation and techniques. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection process using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). There were four stages of the analysis process, namely data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion/verification.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the study, it shows that the most dominant theme of Islamic character building in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) centers on religious ritual activities that are consistently carried out at the beginning and end of each social studies lesson. These findings indicate that lower grade teachers, in this case Teacher ZS (Grade II) and Teacher AZ (Grade III), do not consider social studies learning as a secular activity that is separate from sacred values. Instead, learning is seen as a form of worship that requires spiritual preparation (spiritual warm-up) before entering the cognitive realm.

Ritual Habituation

This section presents the results of a study and discussion that focuses on the construction of the main theme through the lens of the dynamics of ritual habituation. The analysis shows that the narrative theme does not exist as an independent element, but is formed cumulatively through the process of transforming rituals into habits. Within this framework, the discussion will describe how the mechanism of symbolic repetition acts as an instrument for internalizing the social and psychological values of the characters. Therefore, the discussion focuses on exploring how ritual habituation functions as the ontological basis that gives rise to the central theme, and how this phenomenon influences the overall meaning structure of the work being studied.

Based on intensive observations during social studies lessons on the topic of Honoring the Services of Heroes, it was found that Islamic character building was carried out through a structured scaffolding mechanism of verbal responses. This habit formation process does not stand alone as a separate religious activity, but is integrated into every instructional transition in the classroom. Observations noted three main ritual phases that were consistently repeated.

The activity began at exactly 7:15 a.m. with the ritual of Murojaah (repeating) short surah memorization. The teacher led with firm but gentle words: "Bring your hearts together, raise your right hands, and recite Bismillah together." Observation data showed that all 30 students performed the movements simultaneously: placing their right palms on their left chests (a position of respect) and

reciting the basmalah in a regular tone of voice. This pattern indicates that this ritual has become a muscle memory habit that marks the beginning of a sacred learning time zone.

From an educational psychology perspective, this is closely related to the concept of transition rituals. Lower grade students (aged 7-9 years) often find it difficult to shift their focus from fun activities to academic activities that require concentration. Prayer rituals and lining up neatly serve as explicit boundaries that signal to students' brains that playtime is over and learning time has begun.



Figure 1. Ritual Habitation

This is in line with the view of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (2001), who states that the main objective of Islamic education is to instill manners in the broadest sense, namely self-discipline that recognizes the true rights in the hierarchy of knowledge. By beginning the lesson with prayer and manners, the teacher is instilling in students a recognition of the authority of knowledge that comes from Allah SWT. Thus, rituals are not merely customs, but the ethical foundation of all teaching and learning activities.

Integration of Material: Integrating Social Phenomena with the Values of Tauhid and Fiqh

The theme of the interview with Teacher ZS reveals a unique epistemology of learning: "For me, prayer is the door. If we don't ask for Allah's permission at the beginning, the knowledge will not enter." (Interview, 07 may 2025). This statement reflects the teacher's belief that there is a metaphysical dimension to the teaching and learning process. In the Islamic perspective, knowledge (ilm) is often associated with nur (light). Without permission and blessings from the Giver of Light, the process of knowledge transfer can be hampered even if the teacher uses the best pedagogical methods.

On another occasion, during an interview with a teacher, he said, "For example, we are discussing the topic of 'Work' in social studies. I don't just ask, 'What do you want to be?' or list professions. I incorporate the element of monotheism, 'A doctor heals, but who actually gives healing?' The children have to answer, 'Allah'. So, work is just a means or an intermediary. I want to instill in them that all social activities must return to the intention of worshiping Allah, not just to make money." (Interview, 17 may 2025). The study of social sciences from an Islamic perspective must be based on the principle of Wasilah Tauhidi (the means to oneness). Within this theoretical framework, social phenomena particularly professions and occupations are not viewed as end goals, but rather as instrumental means (wasilah) that are entirely dependent on the absolute power of God (Al-Fatir).

In the following interview, he said: "Not only monotheism, I also slipped in some fiqh. When we discussed buying and selling or market activities, which are social studies subjects, I connected them with Islamic law: how to trade honestly, the prohibition of tadlis (deception), or the requirement for accurate weighing. So they understand that social interaction has rules based on sharia law. Learning social studies automatically becomes learning about muamalah (social interactions) as well." (Interview, 23 may 2025). In the context of Islamic social studies, social interactions and economic activities never exist in a value-free space. This theory states that every social transaction must be

subject to the Normative Autonomy of Sharia, in which fiqh laws (such as the prohibition of *tadlis* and weighing regulations) function as a constitution that is morally and legally binding.



Figure 2. Integrated Learning Materials

This concept is strongly supported by the results of interviews with students who explicitly stated: "If the teacher forgets to say the prayer, we remind him. Because if he doesn't say the prayer, it will be difficult to understand the lesson, and we won't receive blessings." (Interview, 05 May 2025). This response from the students shows that this habit has been internalized into their belief system. Students do not see prayer as a formalistic obligation, but rather as a prerequisite for effective learning".

In the next interview, the students explained: "To be honest, sir, when we enter the classroom without saying a prayer, it feels strange... like our hearts are restless, not ready. It feels dark. But once we say *Alhamdulillah* *robbil 'alamin* and the prayer for learning together, our hearts feel calm and our minds feel clear. Only then do we feel ready to receive the social studies material from the teacher. If we haven't said the prayer, it feels like the lesson hasn't officially started." (Interview, 23 May 2025). The interview data above provides a very significant picture of the level of depth of ritual habituation achieved by students. Discussion of this data can be examined through three main aspects: Transcendental Dependency (Spiritual Dependency), Stabilization of Affective Conditions, and Ritual Legitimacy in the Learning System.

This phenomenon can be explained through Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986). Through the process of modeling repeatedly performed by teachers, students form the expectancy that learning without prayer is incomplete and potentially unsuccessful. Furthermore, Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory is also relevant here; the ritual of prayer increases students' spiritual confidence that they are being helped by God in understanding difficult social studies material. Thus, the ritual of prayer serves as a binding tool that stabilizes the emotions and cognitive readiness of lower grade students who tend to be unstable (Santrock, 2014). At the concrete operational stage, emotional security greatly determines their ability to absorb information, and prayer provides that psychological sense of security.

Interactive Habituation: Instilling Ukhuwah and Social Etiquette

Another important aspect of ritualization is the use of a full greeting (*Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh*) instead of a common greeting such as "Hello." The strategy implemented by Teachers ZS and AZ is a serious implementation of manners education. Zakiah Daradjat (2014) emphasizes in her work that character building begins with small habits in language and daily social interactions.

The use of the full greeting in the context of social studies classes has two simultaneous functions. First, the vertical function (worship), which is to spread the grace of Allah in the classroom in accordance with the commands of the Qur'an. Second, the horizontal function (*muamalah*), which is to train students to speak formally, politely, and respectfully.

From a sociological perspective, language is not only a tool for communication, but also a tool for identity. By using Islamic Arabic as a medium of interaction in the classroom, teachers are shaping the cultural identity of students as Muslims who uphold politeness. This is highly relevant to lower grade social studies material that studies “Harmonious Living” and “Social Interaction,” where the use of good language is the foundation of harmonious and civilized social interaction. Through this language ritual, polite character is no longer taught as text in books, but is preserved as a practice of life in the classroom.

Internalization of Values through Active Student Response

One of the most notable findings in this study is the bidirectional nature of the ritual habituation process. Habituation does not only occur from teacher to student, but there is also dynamic interaction when students actively remind their teachers to pray if they forget.

According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1981), children at the conventional stage (generally elementary school age) begin to develop an orientation toward social conformity. They want to be good children who obey the rules. However, in the context of religious Islamic schools, this rises one level to conformity with religious law. When students correct their teachers, they do not intend to be rebellious, but rather because religious values (sharia) have a higher authority in their minds than the authority of their teachers.

This phenomenon is an indicator of successful habituation. Lawrence Kohlberg argues that the highest goal of moral education is to reach the stage of autonomy, where individuals do good because they are aware of the principles, not because of external pressure. In this context, students have internalized the ritual of prayer as a principle that must not be violated, even by authority figures (teachers). This demonstrates a strong madrasah culture, where all educational actors feel a collective obligation to uphold the honor of knowledge and religious values in the classroom.

The Transcendence of Rituals towards Social Behavior

The final part of this discussion on rituals relates to the shift from verbal rituals (prayers/greetings) to concrete physical actions, particularly in the context of maintaining classroom cleanliness. Students consciously pick up trash without being told to do so because this habit is directly linked to the hadith, “Cleanliness is part of faith.”

Within the framework of Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism theory, humans act based on the meaning they give to objects or events around them (Blumer, 1969). In the general secular view, picking up trash is a boring cleaning task or civic duty. However, based on the results of this study, teachers have succeeded in changing the meaning of trash and cleanliness in the minds of students. Cleanliness is no longer merely “free from dirt,” but rather a manifestation of faith.

This shift in meaning is very powerful in motivating student behavior. When a behavior is associated with faith, its value increases from simply “must be done” to “sinful if not done.” This is in line with the concept of Amal Shalih in Islam, where faith must be proven through good deeds. Teachers ZS and AZ have successfully bridged the gap between mahdhah worship rituals (prayer) and ghairu mahdhah worship (cleaning the environment) in the context of social studies learning. Thus, rituals in the classroom do not stop at words and movements, but lead to concrete and tangible changes in social behavior in the school environment.

One of the main limitations in implementing this ritual is the conflict of interest often referred to as the ecological dilemma. In many cases, students' awareness to pick up trash is hindered by physical environmental conditions that are not supportive or purely practical aspects.

Field observations show that students' responses to ritual stimuli are not monolithic, but rather fall into three categories of internalization: 1) Approximately 30-40% of students fall into this category. They do not need verbal instructions or teacher supervision to pick up trash. For this group,

the meaning of faith has been completely substituted into physical action. They will consciously pick up trash even when no one else is watching, indicating that self-control has shifted from heteronomous (external rules) to autonomous (internal rules). 2) This group comprises the majority of students (around 50-60%). They pick up trash not solely because of internal motivation from the hadith, but because of normative pressure from the social environment of the class. When their peers take action to clean the classroom, they join in because they are afraid of being considered lazy or breaking group rules (social compliance). In this group, the meaning of “faith” is still at the cognitive level and does not yet fully motivate spontaneous affective and motor responses. 3) A small percentage of students (around 10%) exhibited selective behavior. They were willing to pick up trash if it was clearly visible, easy to pick up, and located in an area close to where they were sitting (their comfort zone). However, they were reluctant to move to other areas to clean up trash that was not “their doing.” This variation indicates that the habituation process in this group is still at the instrumental stage, where behavior is performed if the cost of work is low, and has not yet reached the level of sacrifice as required by the concept of true charity.

Conclusion

Based on research on Islamic character building in social studies lessons for lower grades at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, it was concluded that: 1) Ritual Habituation as the Main Strategy. Lessons do not begin with cognitive material, but rather with strict religious rituals (hamdalah, prayer). This repetitive habit formation approach has proven to be more effective than verbal instruction in conditioning students' minds to shift from a playful mood to a religious learning mood. 2) Dual Function of Rituals: Psychological and Metaphysical. Prayers and manners serve to stabilize students' emotions psychologically while also serving as a metaphysical means of obtaining grace and blessings of knowledge. This shows that these values have been instilled as beliefs, not just mechanical obedience. 3) Internalization of Values Towards Moral Autonomy. Habituation has reached the stage of internalization, marked by student independence, such as reminding teachers if prayers are missed and maintaining cleanliness as a form of faith (good deeds). Religious values here have a higher authority than just the figure of the teacher. 4) Transcendence of Learning: Social Studies as a Vehicle for Manners. Social studies learning is no longer sterile, but serves as a means of shaping manners and noble character. Teachers have succeeded in integrating the values of tawhid and fiqh muamalah, thereby creating an Islamic and respectful classroom culture. Based on the conclusions of this study, it is recommended that future researchers develop their studies by focusing on the following areas Comparative Studies at Different Levels of Education, Longitudinal Study, Development of an Integrative Learning Model, Multiperspective Study (Leaders and Guardians)

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