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**Internalizing Character Education Values through the
Biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan in Islamic Primary Education**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the internalization of character education values through the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan in learning processes at the Elementary School/Islamic Elementary School. This research employs a qualitative approach using a library research method, focusing on the analysis of the figure's biography and its relevance to strengthening character education within the context of contemporary Islamic education. The findings indicate that KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography embodies several key character values, including religiosity, social awareness, a spirit of reform (tajdid), and rational thinking. These values demonstrate strong relevance for internalization in Islamic elementary school learning processes through various strategies, such as storytelling methods, integration into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, and habituation in daily school activities. Therefore, the biography of Islamic figures serves not only as a source of historical knowledge but also as an effective medium for shaping students' character from an early age. This study contributes to the development of a contextual and applicable history-based character education model in Islamic primary education.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis internalisasi nilai-nilai pendidikan karakter melalui biografi KH Ahmad Dahlan dalam proses pembelajaran di Sekolah Dasar/SD. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode penelitian kepustakaan, yang berfokus pada analisis biografi tokoh tersebut dan relevansinya dalam memperkuat pendidikan karakter dalam konteks pendidikan Islam kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa biografi KH Ahmad Dahlan mengandung beberapa nilai karakter utama, termasuk religiusitas, kesadaran sosial, semangat reformasi (tajdid), dan pemikiran rasional. Nilai-nilai ini menunjukkan relevansi yang kuat untuk internalisasi dalam proses pembelajaran SD melalui berbagai strategi, seperti metode bercerita, integrasi ke dalam kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam, dan pembiasaan dalam kegiatan sekolah sehari-hari. Oleh karena itu, biografi tokoh Islam tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sumber pengetahuan sejarah tetapi juga sebagai media yang efektif untuk membentuk karakter siswa sejak usia dini. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan model pendidikan karakter berbasis sejarah yang kontekstual dan dapat diterapkan dalam pendidikan dasar Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Character education in elementary school/Islamic elementary school (SD/MI) is currently facing increasingly complex challenges, particularly amid social and technological developments that shape children's behavior. The observed decline in moral values, as reflected in low levels of discipline, social empathy, and responsibility among students, indicates that the educational process has not yet optimally facilitated the internalization of character values. In practice, primary-level instruction remains predominantly oriented toward cognitive outcomes

and lacks the integration of contextual and inspirational pedagogical approaches for learners (Wulandari, 2022). In fact, within the tradition of Islamic education, exemplary figures play an important role as a medium for value-based learning. One figure who has made a significant contribution to the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia is KH Ahmad Dahlan, whose educational thoughts and practices are rich in character values that are relevant to be instilled from an early age (Sutarna et al., 2022).

This study aims to analyze the internalization of character education values through the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan within the context of learning in SD/MI. Specifically, this research seeks to examine the biographical profile of the figure as a historical foundation, identify the character education values embedded in his life journey, and formulate forms of implementing these values in learning practices at the primary education level (Wisiyanti, 2024). Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to the development of a history-based character education model that is not only conceptual but also applicable and contextual within contemporary Islamic education.

Several previous studies have examined KH Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts on character education. Wulandari (2022) shows that, according to KH Ahmad Dahlan, the concept of character education emphasizes values of moderation, tolerance, and social concern, rooted in an inclusive understanding of Islam. This study employed a literature review approach to examine the figure's ideas within the context of national education. These findings indicate that the character values developed by KH Ahmad Dahlan are highly relevant to the needs of modern education, particularly in shaping individuals who are morally grounded yet open to change. This is also in line with the study by Wisiyanti (2024), which emphasizes the importance of integrating character values into Islamic education learning in the era of globalization.

Subsequent research highlights the philosophical aspects of education developed by KH Ahmad Dahlan. In the study conducted by Ahmad et al. (2024), it is emphasized that, according to KH Ahmad Dahlan, education aims to form individuals who are balanced in both intellectual and moral aspects. This educational philosophy is grounded in the spirit of reform (*tajdid*) and oriented toward social welfare. This approach demonstrates that education does not merely function as the transfer of knowledge but also as a means of character formation oriented toward humanistic and Islamic values. However, this research remains at the conceptual level and has not yet addressed implementation aspects in primary education learning (Suyadi, 2013).

Furthermore, research conducted by Sutarna dan Anwar (2020) identified various character values in the thought of KH Ahmad Dahlan, such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, hard work, and responsibility. This study used content analysis methods on literature sources discussing the figure's ideas. Meanwhile, other studies have examined the implementation of KH Ahmad Dahlan's character values among primary school students, particularly within Muhammadiyah educational institutions. The results show that the internalization of values is carried out through teacher role modeling, habituation, and integration into learning activities (Sutarna et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the context of these studies remains limited to institutions that are ideologically affiliated with the figure being studied.

Based on a review of previous studies, it can be concluded that most research continues to focus on the conceptual and philosophical aspects of KH Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts on character education. Although studies addressing implementation have been conducted, they remain limited to specific institutional contexts and have not developed the biography of a figure as a pedagogical medium for learning. Therefore, this study offers a distinction by positioning KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography as a learning resource that can be used more broadly within the context of Islamic primary education. This approach emphasizes not only understanding values but also the process of internalizing them through contextual, applicable learning strategies.

To achieve these objectives, this study focuses on three main aspects. First, an examination of KH Ahmad Dahlan's biographical profile as a reformer of Islamic education.

Second, an analysis of the character education values embedded in his life journey. Third, the formulation of the implementation of these values in learning at the SD/MI level. These three aspects are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the biography of an Islamic figure can be optimized as a medium for character education in the context of primary education (Suyadi, 2013).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. The qualitative approach is chosen because this research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the meanings, values, and concepts of character education contained in the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan (Sugiyono, 2013). The library research method is used to examine various written sources, including biographical works on the figure, scientific journal articles, and documents relevant to KH Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts and educational practices. Through this approach, the researcher can explore and interpret character values comprehensively using available textual data. This approach is also considered appropriate for examining educational concepts that are normative and historical in nature (Zed, 2008).

The data collection technique in this study is carried out through documentation, namely by collecting and reviewing primary and secondary sources related to the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan and to character education. Primary sources include works that directly discuss the life and thoughts of KH Ahmad Dahlan, while secondary sources consist of relevant previous research findings. The collected data are then analyzed using content analysis techniques, namely by identifying, classifying, and interpreting the character education values contained in the biography of the figure (Assingkily, 2021). This analysis is conducted systematically to identify key themes that can serve as the basis for formulating a model of value internalization in SD/MI learning.

The results of the data analysis are then interpreted using a descriptive-analytical approach, which involves systematically presenting the findings and relating them to the context of Islamic primary education. At this stage, the researcher not only describes the identified character values but also examines their relevance to learning practices at the SD/MI level (Utami, 2019). Thus, this study does not merely produce conceptual descriptions but also provides practical contributions, including recommendations for a learning model based on the biographies of Islamic figures. The analysis process is carried out iteratively to ensure data validity through source triangulation, namely by comparing the various references used (Sugiyono, 2013).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

KH Ahmad Dahlan as a Reformer of Islamic Education (A Brief Biography)

The discussion of KH Ahmad Dahlan's biographical profile cannot be separated from his social, intellectual, and religious background, which shaped his reformist mindset. KH Ahmad Dahlan was born on August 1, 1868, as Muhammad Darwis, and later became widely known as a prominent ulama and National Hero of Indonesia, recognized as the founder of Muhammadiyah. He was the fourth of seven siblings, born into the family of KH Abu Bakar, a respected ulama and khatib at the Great Mosque of the Yogyakarta Sultanate. Meanwhile, his mother was the daughter of H Ibrahim, who served as the penghulu (chief religious official) of the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate. The name "Ahmad Dahlan" was given by Sayyid Bakri Syatha to Muhammad Darwis, who performed the pilgrimage and pursued his studies in Mecca in the 1880s. This strong religious family background and socio-religious environment became the initial foundation in shaping his Islamic character and intellectual orientation in later life (Jurdi et al., 2010).

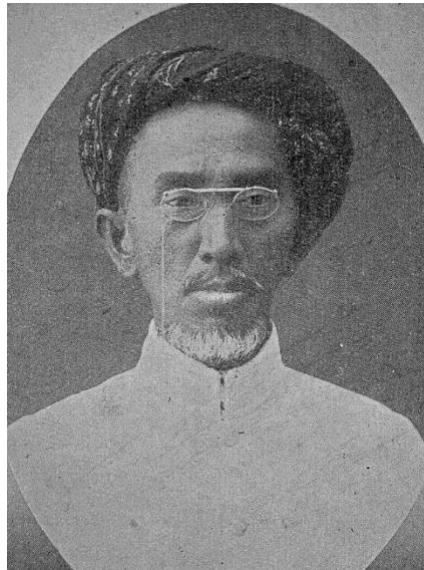


Figure 1. KH Ahmad Dahlan (*commons.wikimedia.org*)

His early education was through the traditional pesantren system, but his intellectual development continued when he traveled to Mecca. His interaction with modernist Islamic thought in the Middle East significantly influenced his perspective on religion and education. This experience became the starting point for the emergence of a critical awareness of religious practices that were considered stagnant and less relevant to the development of the times (Marlini et al., 2024).

From a socio-historical perspective, KH Ahmad Dahlan lived during the Dutch colonial period, when the education system in Indonesia was divided between modern Western education and traditional Islamic education, which tended to be conservative. The colonial education system prioritized rationality and general knowledge, while pesantren education focused on religious sciences without integration with modern knowledge. This condition created an intellectual gap among the indigenous population. KH Ahmad Dahlan viewed this reality as a fundamental problem in Islamic education, which caused Muslims to lag socially and intellectually. Therefore, he regarded educational reform as an urgent necessity to bridge this gap (Mala, 2023).

From this background, it can be understood that the educational reform carried out by KH Ahmad Dahlan was not merely a spontaneous response but rather the result of critical reflection on the socio-religious conditions he encountered. He realized that education plays a strategic role in shaping the quality of the ummah, making changes to the education system a key factor in building a more advanced Islamic civilization. In this context, KH Ahmad Dahlan developed an educational paradigm that emphasized the integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge as an effort to eliminate the dichotomy of knowledge that had hindered the progress of Muslims (Yusril, 2025).

Furthermore, the educational mindset of KH Ahmad Dahlan demonstrates rationality, progressiveness, and contextuality. He not only emphasized the importance of understanding religious texts literally, but also encouraged the use of reason in interpreting Islamic teachings. This approach is reflected in his efforts to develop an education system that is adaptable to advances in science and technology. KH Ahmad Dahlan argued that education must respond to the challenges of the times, so that students not only possess a sound understanding of religion but also adequate intellectual competence. Thus, education does not merely function as a means of knowledge transmission, but also as a medium for social transformation (Mutaqin et al., 2025).

The role of KH Ahmad Dahlan in the reform of Islamic education became increasingly evident through the establishment of the Muhammadiyah organization in 1912. Through this organization, he implemented his reformist ideas through educational institutions that integrated religious and general curricula. Muhammadiyah schools became a concrete embodiment of the modern educational concept he proposed, in which learning methods were no longer limited to memorization but also emphasized understanding, discussion, and practice. In addition, he introduced a more open and inclusive education system, including providing access to education for previously marginalized groups (Akhyar et al., 2024).

If analyzed more deeply, KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography shows a close relationship with the values of character education. His life experiences, marked by a spirit of reform, reflect values such as courage, openness, and a commitment to change. In addition, his concern for social conditions indicates strong values of empathy and social responsibility. These values are not only part of his theoretical thinking, but are also reflected in the concrete actions he carried out through educational movements until his death on February 23, 1923. This shows that a figure's biography can serve as an effective learning resource for instilling character values, providing concrete examples students can emulate.

Furthermore, the educational ideas of KH Ahmad Dahlan also embody egalitarian values, namely the provision of equal educational opportunities for all groups regardless of social status. He established schools accessible to the broader community, including people with low incomes, to improve the quality of life of the ummah. This approach demonstrates that education is not only an academic process but also a means of social empowerment. Thus, the educational reform carried out by KH Ahmad Dahlan has dimensions that are not only intellectual but also social and moral (Sita & Haryanto, 2022).

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the biographical profile of KH Ahmad Dahlan as a reformer of Islamic education is not only important in a historical context but also highly relevant to the development of character education today. His background, the socio-religious conditions he encountered, and his active role in educational reform demonstrate that educational change must be grounded in a deep understanding of social realities and contemporary needs. Therefore, the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan can serve as an inspirational source in designing education that is not only oriented toward knowledge but also toward the holistic formation of students' character.

Character Education Values in the Biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan

The analysis of KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography in this study uses a content analysis approach to extract the character education values embedded in his life journey and thoughts. This approach enables the researcher to identify values that are not only explicit but also implicit in the figure's actions and ideas. Based on the analysis, several key values relevant to primary education are identified, namely religiosity, sincerity, social concern, the spirit of reform (*tajdid*), rationality, responsibility, and exemplary conduct. These values not only have a historical foundation but also demonstrate strong relevance to modern character education theories that emphasize the integration of values into daily life practices (Lickona, 2022).

1. Religiosity

Religiosity is a fundamental value embedded in KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography. His life, shaped within a family of ulama and marked by his early involvement in religious activities, indicates that religiosity is not merely a theoretical aspect but a lived, daily practice. In this context, religiosity is not only interpreted as ritual obedience but also as spiritual awareness that drives constructive social actions (Marlini et al., 2024). Furthermore, KH Ahmad Dahlan's religiosity is reflected in his efforts to purify Islamic teachings through a contextual approach. He emphasized the importance of understanding religion not only textually but also in relation to social realities. This demonstrates that the religiosity he

developed was dynamic and adaptive, enabling it to respond to the challenges of the times (Mutaqin et al., 2025).

From the perspective of character education, this value of religiosity is crucial to be instilled in SD/MI students as a moral foundation. Religiosity can be internalized through the habituation of worship practices, reflection on spiritual values, and integration into daily learning activities. Thus, religiosity not only shapes spiritual aspects but also influences students' social behavior.

2. Sincerity

Sincerity is a highly prominent character trait in KH Ahmad Dahlan's life journey. His dedication to developing Islamic education and da'wah was carried out without personal interests, but solely for the benefit of the ummah. This is evident in his efforts to establish educational institutions that were open to the wider community (Akhyar et al., 2024). Sincerity is also reflected in his consistent attitude in facing various challenges, including resistance from groups opposing reform. KH Ahmad Dahlan remained steadfast in his principles without being influenced by social pressures, demonstrating strong moral integrity (Yusril, 2025).

In the context of character education, sincerity can be developed through the habituation of honesty, responsibility, and genuine action. Teachers can instill this value through role modeling and by providing opportunities for students to perform good deeds without expecting rewards.

3. Social Concern

The value of social concern is one of the main characteristics that stand out in KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography. He is known as a figure who paid close attention to the conditions of society, particularly those of the poor and marginalized. This is reflected in the social programs developed through Muhammadiyah, such as education and social services (Sita & Haryanto, 2022). KH Ahmad Dahlan's social concern was not merely charitable but also transformative. He sought to empower society through education so that people could improve their quality of life independently. This approach indicates that social concern should be directed toward structural change rather than merely temporary assistance.

In primary education, this value can be internalized through cooperative activities, social programs, and project-based learning. Thus, students not only understand the concept of empathy but also can implement it in real life.

4. The Spirit of Reform (*Tajdid*)

The spirit of reform (*tajdid*) is a distinctive feature of KH Ahmad Dahlan's thought. He sought to reform various aspects of life, particularly Islamic education, which he considered stagnant. This spirit was driven by the awareness that change is necessary to respond to the development of the times (Mala, 2023). KH Ahmad Dahlan integrated religious and general knowledge as a form of educational reform. He rejected the dichotomy of knowledge that had hindered Muslim progress. This approach demonstrates that education must be holistic and relevant to the needs of modern society (Yusril, 2025).

In the context of character education, the value of *tajdid* can be fostered by developing innovative, creative, and open-minded attitudes toward change. Students are encouraged to think critically and not accept ideas dogmatically, enabling them to adapt to the times.

5. Rationality and Open-Mindedness

KH Ahmad Dahlan is known as a figure who highly valued rationality in understanding religious teachings. He encouraged the use of reason to interpret religious

texts contextually. This approach demonstrates that Islam is not opposed to rationality but instead promotes critical thinking (Mutaqin et al., 2025). KH Ahmad Dahlan's open-mindedness is also evident in his non-exclusive attitude toward differences. He was able to engage in dialogue with various groups and accept constructive new ideas. This shows that education should foster tolerant and inclusive attitudes.

In primary education, this value can be developed through interactive learning methods, such as discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and problem-solving activities. Thus, students become not only recipients of information but also individuals capable of critical and analytical thinking.

6. Responsibility and Exemplary Conduct

The values of responsibility and exemplary conduct are essential to KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography. He not only conveyed ideas but also demonstrated them through concrete actions. This exemplary conduct became a key factor in the success of the reform movement he initiated (Akhyar et al., 2024). His sense of responsibility toward the ummah is reflected in his consistent dedication to developing education and da'wah. He demonstrated that change cannot be achieved without strong commitment and real action.

In character education, teacher role modeling becomes a key factor in the internalization of values. Students tend to imitate the behaviors they observe, thus teachers must be able to serve as good role models. Therefore, character education is not merely theoretical but also practical.

The character education values reflected in the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan indicate that this figure is not only an educator but also a source of inspiration for the development of character education. These values are highly relevant to internalization in primary education, enabling the formation of students who are not only intellectually capable but also possess strong character.

Methodologically, the findings regarding the values of character education in the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan were obtained through a content analysis approach that systematically categorizes values based on key themes emerging from biographical sources. This analytical process does not merely identify values descriptively but also categorizes them according to the character education framework, such as religious, moral, social, and intellectual values. Furthermore, these values are linked to character education theory, which emphasizes the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, thereby producing a comprehensive understanding of character internalization in primary education. Thus, this analysis affirms that the biography of a figure serves not only as a historical narrative but also as a rich pedagogical resource for developing contextual and applicable character-education models.

Implementation of Character Values Based on the Biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan in SD/MI Learning

The implementation of character education values based on the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan in SD/MI learning represents the practical stage of the two previous discussions: the biography of the figure and the character values embedded within it. This approach positions biography as a pedagogical resource that is not only informative but also transformative in shaping students' character. In the context of primary education, character values must be systematically implemented through contextual, integrative, and sustainable learning strategies. This is in line with modern character education approaches that emphasize the importance of meaningful learning experiences and active student engagement in the learning process (Mulyani et al., 2023).

Conceptually, this implementation can be developed through various approaches, such as the storytelling method, integration into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning,

habituation (habit formation), teacher role modeling, and school activities based on religious and social values. These approaches complement each other in forming a holistic character education ecosystem. In this regard, the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan functions as the main medium that connects abstract values with concrete examples that students easily understand (Mahamid, 2024).

1. Implementation through the Storytelling Method (Narratives of Figures)

Storytelling is one of the most effective approaches for instilling character values in primary school students. Stories about KH Ahmad Dahlan can be used as engaging and inspirational learning media. Through storytelling, students can understand values such as religiosity, sincerity, and social concern in a contextual and emotional way. This aligns with the characteristics of primary-level students, who tend to absorb values more easily through narratives than through abstract concepts (Mahamid, 2024).

In practice, teachers can present stories about KH Ahmad Dahlan through various media, such as oral storytelling, storybooks, or audiovisual materials. The use of diverse media will enhance student engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, storytelling can be combined with reflective activities, such as discussions or personal experience writing, allowing students to internalize values more deeply (Nurbaya et al., 2022). Moreover, the storytelling method not only serves as a medium for value transmission but also as a tool to develop students' literacy and critical thinking skills. Thus, learning is not only focused on character development but also on balanced academic competence.

2. Integration into Islamic Religious Education Learning

The integration of character values derived from KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography into PAI learning can be achieved through the development of learning materials, methods, and evaluation. In this context, values such as religiosity, rationality, and responsibility can be integrated into relevant learning topics. For instance, when discussing morality (*akhlaq*), teachers can relate it to concrete examples from KH Ahmad Dahlan's life. This integrative approach enables students to see the connection between theory and practice, making learning more meaningful. In addition, value integration can be implemented through a thematic approach that connects various subjects around shared character values. This is in line with the concept of character education that emphasizes the integration of values across all aspects of learning (Herawati & Mirza, 2026).

In learning evaluation, teachers can apply authentic assessment approaches that measure not only cognitive aspects but also students' attitudes and behaviors. Thus, character education becomes not merely part of the curriculum but also an integral part of daily learning practices.

3. Habituation

Habituation is an important strategy in the internalization of character values. Values learned must be reinforced through repeated practice in daily life. In this context, schools play a crucial role in fostering an environment that supports students' character development. Habituation can be carried out through routine activities, such as collective prayers, social activities, and discipline in following school rules. Values such as sincerity, responsibility, and social concern can be instilled through these activities. This approach emphasizes that character is not only taught but also trained through real-life experiences (Kurniawan, 2016).

In addition, habituation must involve all members of the school community, including teachers, students, and educational staff. In this way, a school culture is formed that supports continuous character development.

4. Teacher Role Modeling

Teacher role modeling is a key factor in character education. Teachers function not only as instructors but also as role models for students. In this context, the values embedded in KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography must be reflected in teachers' daily behavior. Teachers who demonstrate religiosity, honesty, and responsibility provide concrete examples for students. This aligns with the principle that students tend to imitate behaviors they observe. Therefore, teacher role modeling becomes one of the most effective strategies for the internalization of character values (Nisa', 2019).

Furthermore, role modeling can be strengthened through positive interactions between teachers and students. Good relationships create a conducive learning environment that supports the optimal development of students' character.

5. School Activities (Religious and Social)

School activities are an important medium for implementing character education. Programs such as religious activities, social services, and extracurricular activities can serve as practical means to internalize character values. Through religious activities, students can develop spiritual and moral values. Meanwhile, social activities can foster empathy and concern for others. This approach demonstrates that character education does not only occur in the classroom but also through various activities within the school environment (Rachmawati et al., 2025).

Furthermore, school activities can be designed contextually by drawing on the values contained in KH Ahmad Dahlan's biography. In this way, students not only understand values theoretically but also implement them in their daily lives.

Overall, the implementation of character values based on the biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan in SD/MI learning demonstrates a close relationship between historical, conceptual, and applicative aspects. Biography as a historical source provides the foundation for understanding the figure; character values, as a conceptual aspect, provide direction for character formation; and implementation, as an applicative aspect, shows how these values can be applied in educational practice. The synergy among these three aspects results in a learning model that is not only systematic and scientific but also makes a tangible contribution to the development of character education at the primary level.

CONCLUSION

The biography of KH Ahmad Dahlan, a reformer of Islamic education, is highly relevant to the development of character education at the SD/MI level. The background of his life and the socio-religious conditions he encountered shaped a progressive, integrative, and contextual educational mindset. From an analysis of his biography, key character education values were identified, including religiosity, sincerity, social concern, the spirit of reform (*tajdid*), rationality, responsibility, and exemplary conduct. These values are not only conceptual but also have practical foundations that can be implemented in learning through various strategies, such as storytelling methods, integration into Islamic Religious Education (PAI), habituation, teacher role modeling, and school activities grounded in religious and social values. Thus, the biography of a figure can serve as an effective pedagogical resource for fostering students' character holistically.

This study recommends further research examining other Islamic figures at the national scale as sources for character education, including ulama, local figures, and historical personalities who have contributed to education and social development. Future studies may expand the approach by integrating field research in schools to assess the effectiveness of character value implementation empirically. In addition, exploring various models of value

internalization grounded in the biographies of figures is essential to enrich learning strategies that are contextual and adaptive to students' needs across different regions of Indonesia.

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