

The Contribution of Student Literary Works to Character Education in Indonesian Islamic Universities

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Abstract: This study examines the role of student-generated literary works in character education within Indonesian Islamic higher education. It aims to understand how literary methods support moral and ethical development alongside language skills in this cultural and religious context. The research uses a qualitative descriptive design, including document analysis, interviews, and classroom observations to collect detailed data on educational practices and student experiences. Findings show that incorporating Islamic themes and local cultural wisdom into literary activities strengthens students' character formation by fostering values such as integrity, responsibility, and social awareness. Student literary productions effectively promote critical thinking, empathy, and self-expression. The study also emphasizes the importance of curriculum design that integrates literary methods with character education goals, supported by collaborative learning strategies. Overall, the research demonstrates that literary methods offer a holistic approach to character education, enhancing both moral development and language proficiency. These findings provide practical insights for educators and curriculum developers aiming to integrate character education through literature in Islamic higher education. The study contributes to understanding culturally relevant educational practices and suggests future research on long-term effects and digital literary forms.

Keywords: character education, curriculum design, Indonesian Islamic higher education, literary methods, student-generated literature

1. Introduction

Character education holds a pivotal position within Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions, serving as a foundational element in the moral development and identity formation of students. These institutions emphasize not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the cultivation of ethical values and a strong sense of self that aligns with Islamic principles. The integration of religious teachings into the educational framework guides students toward embodying virtues such as justice, honesty, and compassion, which are essential for their personal and social lives (Ilmi et al. 2023; Suparjo and Hidayah 2023). This dual focus on intellectual and moral education reflects the broader mission of Islamic education in Indonesia,

which seeks to produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also morally responsible citizens.

Moreover, character education in these institutions is deeply intertwined with the national ideology of Pancasila, which underscores the importance of fostering values such as nationalism, cooperation, and integrity among the younger generation. The role of character education extends beyond individual development to encompass societal contributions, ensuring that students internalize values that support national unity and social harmony (Tuhuteru et al. 2023). The incorporation of local wisdom into character education further enriches this process by grounding moral development in culturally relevant contexts. Research highlights that embedding local values within the curriculum enhances students' understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage, thereby strengthening their identity and ethical outlook (Hidayati et al. 2020). This multifaceted approach underscores the significance of character education as a holistic endeavor that nurtures both the mind and the spirit within Indonesian Islamic higher education.

Despite its recognized importance, the implementation of character education in Indonesian Islamic higher education faces several challenges. One prominent issue is the inconsistency and lack of systematic integration of character education within academic curricula. While the theoretical framework for character education is well-established, practical application often remains fragmented, limiting its effectiveness in shaping student behavior and attitudes (Izfanna and Hisyam 2012). Additionally, there is a need to address the gap between educational objectives and the actual experiences of students, who may not always find character education engaging or relevant to their personal development. This disconnect calls for innovative approaches that can bridge theory and practice, making character education more accessible and impactful.

In response to these challenges, scholars have proposed various general solutions aimed at enhancing the delivery of character education. One widely advocated strategy is the integration of character education values directly into the curriculum, ensuring that moral development is not treated as an ancillary component but as a core educational goal. Furthermore, the use of literature as a pedagogical tool has gained attention for its potential to engage students in ethical reflection and moral reasoning. Literary works, particularly those that explore complex character narratives and ethical dilemmas, provide rich material for students to analyze and internalize values in a meaningful way (Suciati et al. 2023). This approach not only supports language acquisition but also fosters critical thinking and empathy, which are crucial for character formation.

Building on these general strategies, specific solutions have emerged from prior research that highlight the unique contributions of Arabic literature to character education. Arabic literary texts, often embedded with Islamic values and teachings, offer students opportunities to explore ethical scenarios and moral behavior through narrative forms (Septiani 2021). The Bildungsroman genre, in particular, illustrates character growth and the navigation of ethical challenges,

serving as a valuable resource for moral education (Novianti 2017). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that language learning, especially Arabic language acquisition in Islamic boarding schools, can effectively internalize character education values. This integration aligns with local educational regulations that promote the embedding of moral values within academic programs, ensuring that students develop noble qualities alongside linguistic skills (Alwi et al. 2024). These findings underscore the potential of literary engagement and language learning as complementary pathways for fostering character development.

Despite these advances, a notable gap remains in the literature concerning the role of student-generated literary works in character education. While much attention has been given to the use of established literary texts, less is known about how students' own creative outputs—such as narratives, essays, and poetry—contribute to their moral and character development. Research suggests that student-generated works can serve as powerful tools for reflection and expression, allowing learners to articulate their understanding of character values in personal and contextually relevant ways (Puspita et al. 2019; Shaleha and Purbani 2019). This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how such creative practices can be systematically incorporated into character education frameworks to enhance student engagement and internalization of ethical principles.

In light of the identified research gap, this study aims to explore the impact of student-generated literary works on character education within Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. The research seeks to examine how the process of creating literary texts by students can facilitate the internalization of key character values such as humility, respect, and responsibility. By focusing on this innovative approach, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on character education by offering empirical insights into the practical application of creative writing as a medium for moral development. The scope of the study is confined to Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, where the integration of religious teachings and character education is particularly pronounced. This focus allows for an in-depth understanding of the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of student-generated literary works in fostering character education. Ultimately, the study aspires to provide recommendations for educators and policymakers on how to harness literary creativity to support holistic character formation in Islamic higher education settings.

2. Method

2.1 Research design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the role of student-generated literary works in character education within Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. Qualitative descriptive methodologies are particularly effective in examining literary output in educational contexts, as they provide rich, contextualized understandings of participants' experiences and the educational processes involved (Irwansyah et al. 2019). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how character education is embedded and manifested through

literary creativity, emphasizing the perspectives of students and educators in Islamic universities. The qualitative descriptive framework facilitates a comprehensive examination of the phenomena without imposing theoretical constraints, thereby preserving the authenticity of participants' narratives and educational practices.

2.2 Participants and setting

The participants in this study consist of students and educators from selected Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, specifically those engaged in literary and language programs that incorporate character education. These institutions are characterized by their integration of Islamic values and local cultural wisdom into their curricula, aligning with national educational goals (Hidayati et al. 2020; Suparjo and Hidayah 2023). The selection criteria for participants include active involvement in literary creation, such as writing novels, poems, or essays that reflect character education themes. The setting includes classrooms, literary workshops, and institutional environments where character education is explicitly promoted through language and literature instruction. This context provides a fertile ground for investigating the interplay between literary creativity and moral development.

2.3 Data collection methods

Data collection in this study is conducted through multiple qualitative techniques to ensure a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. The methods include documentation, interviews, and classroom observations, each contributing unique insights into the educational processes and outcomes related to student-generated literary works.

2.3.1 Documentation

Documentation serves as a critical data source, encompassing a variety of artifacts related to students' literary outputs and educational materials. This includes students' written works such as novels, poems, and essays, as well as teaching materials, lesson plans, and curricular frameworks that support character education through literature (Irwansyah et al. 2019). The analysis of these documents enables the researcher to trace the integration of character values within literary texts and instructional strategies, providing evidence of how literary creativity is harnessed as a pedagogical tool.

2.3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with both students and educators to gain deeper insights into their experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding the role of literature in character education. These interviews explore how participants view the significance of literary creation in fostering moral values and personal development. The qualitative nature of the interviews allows for open-ended

responses, facilitating the emergence of rich, nuanced data that reflect individual and collective understandings of character education through literature.

2.3.3 Classroom observations

Classroom observations are employed to capture the dynamics of teaching and learning processes that encourage literary creativity and character development. Observations focus on instructional methods, student interactions, and the use of literary texts within the classroom setting. This method provides contextual data on how educators implement character education through literature and how students engage with these pedagogical approaches in real time. Observational data complement documentation and interview findings by offering a direct view of educational practices.

2.4 Data analysis procedures

The data collected through documentation, interviews, and observations are analyzed using a systematic qualitative approach inspired by the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles and Huberman 1994). This model emphasizes three core activities: Data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles and Huberman 1994). Although some references (Major and Savin-Baden 2010; Al Faruq et al. 2024) discuss qualitative research synthesis broadly, this study applies the principles of the Miles and Huberman model specifically to enhance the rigor and depth of analysis in the context of character education research. Data reduction involves the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data to identify relevant themes and patterns related to literary creativity and character education. This step includes coding textual data from interviews and documents, as well as field notes from observations. Data display is achieved through organized matrices, charts, and narrative summaries that facilitate the visualization of relationships and emerging themes. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification involve interpreting the data to develop meaningful insights and ensuring the credibility of findings through iterative review and triangulation across data sources. The iterative nature of this model allows the researcher to refine the focus of analysis based on emerging evidence, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's conclusions. This approach aligns with the inductive reasoning process, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations about the role of student-generated literary works in character education.

2.5 Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies are employed. Triangulation of data sources—combining documentation, interviews, and observations—strengthens the credibility of findings by cross-verifying information from multiple perspectives. Member checking is conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the results. Additionally, a clear audit trail is maintained, documenting the research process and decisions to enhance transparency and dependability. The

study also adheres to ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respectful representation of participants' voices. These measures contribute to the overall rigor and integrity of the research, ensuring that the findings provide a valid and reliable contribution to the understanding of character education through literary creativity in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

3. Results

3.1 Student-generated literary works and character education

3.1.1 Data collection and documentation of literary outputs

The data collection process involved comprehensive documentation of student-generated literary works, including novels, poems, and essays produced within Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. These artifacts were gathered from academic archives, literary workshops, and institutional publication records. The documentation revealed a significant volume of creative output, reflecting a growing trend of student engagement in literary production as part of their language and character education curricula (Hamzah et al. 2022). The collected works consistently demonstrated the integration of Islamic values and local cultural wisdom, aligning with the educational goals of fostering moral development through literature (Annisa et al. 2024).

Teaching materials and curricular frameworks were also reviewed to contextualize the literary outputs within the broader pedagogical strategies employed by the institutions. These documents highlighted the deliberate inclusion of character education themes, such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy, embedded within literary assignments and projects. The documentation phase provided a foundational understanding of the scope and nature of student literary creativity, serving as a primary data source for subsequent analysis.

3.1.2 Analytical framework and data analysis

The analysis of the documented literary works and educational materials was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which facilitated systematic data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Idris 2023). This model enabled the researchers to identify recurring themes and patterns related to character education within the student texts. Data reduction involved coding the literary works for explicit and implicit representations of moral values and cultural elements.

The data display phase utilized matrices and thematic charts to organize findings, allowing for clear visualization of how character education was manifested across different genres and institutional contexts. The iterative nature of the Miles and Huberman model supported the refinement of analytical categories, ensuring that emergent themes were grounded in the data.

Additionally, interviews and classroom observations complemented the document analysis by providing contextual insights into the pedagogical intentions

and student experiences associated with literary creation (Ahmadi et al., 2024). This triangulation of data sources enhanced the validity of the findings and offered a holistic perspective on the role of student literary output in character education.

3.1.3 Key findings: Literary creativity, educational frameworks, and cultural relevance

The findings indicate that student-generated literary works serve as a vital medium for embedding and expressing character education within Indonesian Islamic higher education. The literary texts frequently incorporated themes of moral virtue, social responsibility, and cultural identity, reflecting the dual objectives of language proficiency and ethical development (Annisa et al. 2024). The integration of Islamic values was evident not only in narrative content but also in the stylistic and thematic choices made by students, demonstrating a deep engagement with their cultural and religious heritage.

Educational frameworks that emphasize Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) principles were found to be particularly effective in fostering this integration, as they situate literary tasks within meaningful real-life contexts that resonate with students' experiences (Nazhimah and Mohammad 2023). Furthermore, the incorporation of multimedia and interactive learning models enhanced student engagement and creativity, supporting the development of literary skills alongside character education (Ahmadi et al. 2024).

Extracurricular activities, such as writing workshops and literary competitions organized by student associations, played a significant role in nurturing literary talent and reinforcing character education outside formal classroom settings (Jundi et al. 2022). These activities provided students with opportunities to receive feedback, refine their writing, and express social and cultural issues through their narratives.

The application of the Miles and Huberman model in analyzing qualitative data proved instrumental in revealing how literary creativity contributes to moral and cultural education. The model's systematic approach allowed for the identification of key themes such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and cultural pride, which were consistently embedded in student works (Ismail, AlGhafari and Ibrahim 2023).

Moreover, the documentation of publication timelines and volumes indicated a positive correlation between institutional support for literary creativity and the frequency of student publications (Maggio et al. 2020). This suggests that structured academic programs and supportive environments significantly influence students' motivation and ability to produce meaningful literary works.

Therefore, the results underscore the transformative potential of student-written Arabic novels and other literary forms in Indonesian Islamic higher education. These creative outputs not only enhance language proficiency but also serve as powerful vehicles for character education, cultural expression, and critical engagement. The integration of qualitative research methodologies and educational

frameworks provides a robust foundation for understanding and further developing literary creativity as a pedagogical tool.

3.2. The impact of literary methods on character education

Here is the detailed English version of the analysis on how various literary methods used in student-generated literary works influence character education. The results are organized into six sub-sections, each discussing a specific literary method: Realism, Romanticism, Symbolism, Historical Method, Magical Realism, and Classical Literature. Each sub-section covers observed educational outcomes, student engagement patterns, moral development indicators, linguistic skill improvements, and cultural awareness aspects, supported by relevant literature citations.

3.2.1 Realism

Observed educational outcomes: Realism, which emphasizes the depiction of everyday life and authentic human experiences, significantly promotes reflective writing practices among students. This method facilitates critical engagement with moral complexities and ethical dilemmas, enabling students to develop a deep understanding of character motivations and social responsibility (Novianti 2017).

Student engagement patterns: Students show increased engagement by exploring scenarios they can personally and realistically relate to, triggering introspection and emotional connection with the narrative content. This engagement is reflected in their analytical approach to character decisions and consequences.

Moral development indicators: Realistic portrayals of ethical challenges stimulate moral reasoning, encouraging students to confront dilemmas similar to real-life situations. This process fosters empathy and ethical awareness as foundational elements of character education.

Linguistic skill improvements: Realism enhances students' descriptive abilities and expands vocabulary relevant to social contexts, promoting clarity and precision in language use. Additionally, it encourages varied sentence structures to effectively convey complex ideas.

Cultural awareness aspects: By situating narratives within familiar cultural contexts, realism deepens students' appreciation of social norms and values, increasing sensitivity to cultural nuances and diversity.

3.2.2 Romanticism

Observed educational outcomes: Romanticism emphasizes emotional expression and individual experience, providing space for students to explore personal narratives and internal psychological states. This method supports the development of self-awareness and emotional intelligence (Noviadi et al. 2023).

Student engagement patterns: Students engage emotionally in writing, allowing them to express feelings and personal experiences deeply, which enhances motivation and involvement in the learning process.

Moral development indicators: Exploration of emotional narratives helps students develop empathy and understanding of others' perspectives, which are crucial aspects of character education.

Linguistic skill improvements: Romanticism encourages the use of expressive and imaginative language, enriching emotional vocabulary and refining students' narrative skills.

Cultural awareness aspects: By focusing on individual experiences, romanticism opens space for reflection on cultural identity and diverse personal values.

3.2.3. Symbolism

Observed educational outcomes: Symbolism invites students to embed deeper meanings in their writing, promoting symbolic thinking that aids in understanding complex character traits (Masjid et al. 2022).

Student engagement patterns: Students are motivated to use symbols and metaphors creatively, enhancing their involvement in meaning-making and text interpretation.

Moral development indicators: The use of symbols enriches moral understanding by allowing students to convey ethical ideas and human behaviors implicitly and reflectively.

Linguistic skill improvements: Symbolism broadens students' ability to use figurative language and rhetoric, increasing the subtlety and depth of linguistic expression.

Cultural awareness aspects: Symbolism provides opportunities to explore diverse cultural contexts through culturally meaningful symbols, deepening cross-cultural awareness.

3.2.4. Historical method

Observed educational outcomes: The historical method enables students to investigate past societies, cultural norms, and ethical values, providing a background for exploring characters that highlight the moral relevance of history to contemporary issues.

Student engagement patterns: Students show interest in connecting historical contexts with character narratives, enriching their understanding of social and moral dynamics.

Moral development indicators: This approach fosters awareness of the continuity of moral values and the importance of historical reflection in character formation.

Linguistic skill improvements: Students develop strong analytical and narrative skills through the use of language appropriate to historical and cultural contexts.

Cultural awareness aspects: The historical method strengthens students' understanding of cultural heritage and values that shape social identity.

3.2.5. Magical realism

Observed educational outcomes: Magical realism expands creative boundaries, encouraging students to challenge conventions and explore themes of justice and morality through fantastical or surreal elements (Rahmanikhalilelahi 2023).

Student engagement patterns: Students are encouraged to imagine and incorporate magical elements into their narratives, boosting engagement and innovation in writing.

Moral development indicators: This method allows exploration of ethical dilemmas in imaginative contexts, helping students conceptualize alternative viewpoints and broaden moral perspectives.

Linguistic skill improvements: Magical realism enriches narrative and descriptive skills with creative and metaphorical language, enhancing linguistic flexibility.

Cultural awareness aspects: This approach opens space for reflection on cultural diversity and myths, deepening cross-cultural and symbolic understanding.

3.2.6. Classical literature

Observed educational outcomes: Interaction with classical literature provides students with time-tested moral lessons and frameworks for understanding virtues, morality, and the human condition.

Student engagement patterns: Students engage with intellectually and morally challenging canonical texts, promoting disciplined analytical reading and critical thinking.

Moral development indicators: Classical works offer paradigms of ethical behavior and character virtues, reinforcing moral education through exemplary narratives and archetypal characters.

Linguistic skill improvements: Exposure to classical language styles enriches vocabulary and comprehension of complex syntax, enhancing students' linguistic sophistication.

Cultural awareness aspects: Classical literature connects students with foundational cultural narratives, strengthening cultural identity and literary historical understanding.

Summary and comparative analysis

The various literary methods analyzed demonstrate significant contributions to student character education through enhanced reflective, emotional, and analytical skills. Realism and magical realism stand out in promoting critical thinking and moral dilemma exploration, while romanticism and symbolism enrich emotional intelligence and expressive abilities. The historical method and classical literature reinforce cultural awareness and sustained moral value comprehension.

3.3 Theoretical frameworks and implementation of literary methods in character education

3.3.1 Character education

The analysis of character education values embedded in student-authored literature necessitates robust theoretical frameworks to systematically interpret and evaluate these values. Theoretical frameworks provide essential lenses through which researchers can discern how character traits are represented, developed, and communicated within literary texts. They also facilitate the understanding of the pedagogical implications of literature as a medium for character education. By applying these frameworks, scholars can uncover the nuanced ways in which student writers integrate moral and ethical values into their narratives, thereby contributing to both literary scholarship and educational practice.

3.3.2 Major character values in student literature

Religiosity and Cultural Context

Religiosity emerges as a dominant theme in student literature, reflecting the cultural and societal significance of religion in Indonesian contexts. Narratives often incorporate religious principles as moral foundations, illustrating characters' faith journeys and ethical decision-making aligned with spiritual beliefs (Damayanti and Nurgiyantoro 2019). This embedding of religiosity not only mirrors students' lived experiences but also reinforces the role of faith in shaping character.

Integrity and moral development

Integrity is frequently portrayed through characters confronting moral dilemmas and choosing honesty and ethical conduct despite challenges. Such depictions encourage readers to internalize the importance of moral fortitude and ethical

consistency (Weci et al. 2022). These narratives serve as exemplars for students to emulate integrity in their personal and social lives.

Responsibility and social impact

Student literature often highlights responsibility by illustrating the consequences of characters' actions within familial and societal contexts. Through character-driven plots, authors emphasize accountability and the social ramifications of decisions, fostering a sense of duty and conscientiousness among readers (Damayanti and Nurgiyantoro 2019).

Empathy and multicultural understanding

Empathy is cultivated through character interactions that expose readers to diverse perspectives and social realities. These narratives promote compassion and encourage readers to appreciate differences, which is particularly vital in multicultural educational settings (Weci et al. 2022). Empathy thus becomes a tool for social cohesion and ethical awareness.

Tolerance and inclusion

Tolerance is depicted by narratives that embrace diversity and advocate for inclusion. Student authors use literary techniques to challenge prejudices and foster acceptance, thereby nurturing open-mindedness and respect for others' beliefs and backgrounds.

Nationalism and cultural identity

Nationalism is woven into stories that celebrate cultural heritage and collective identity. By referencing historical events and cultural symbols, student literature instills pride and a sense of belonging, encouraging readers to value their national identity and cultural roots (Damayanti and Nurgiyantoro 2019).

Critical thinking and ethical reasoning

Critical thinking is integrated through plotlines that present moral conflicts requiring reflection and reasoned decision-making. These narratives engage readers in ethical reasoning, prompting them to evaluate complex situations and develop sound moral judgments (Damayanti and Nurgiyantoro 2019).

Theoretical frameworks

Appraisal theory in systemic functional linguistics (SFL) for value analysis

Appraisal Theory, as articulated within systemic functional linguistics, offers a powerful tool for analyzing evaluative language in literary texts. Li (2024) highlights how this framework enables researchers to dissect how authors establish values through character depictions and societal commentary. By examining linguistic choices, scholars can reveal the moral frameworks embedded within

narratives, providing insight into how character education values are communicated implicitly and explicitly.

Character education program in curriculum

The Character Education Program, grounded in contemporary educational theories, emphasizes the deliberate infusion of character values into curricula through literary mediums. Eko (2021) advocate for the use of selected texts in language education that consciously embed values such as integrity, responsibility, and empathy. This approach facilitates critical engagement and allows educators to guide discussions on character development within literary contexts, linking theory directly to pedagogical practice.

Local wisdom and cultural narratives

Studies by Efendi and Muttaqien (2017) focus on the integration of local wisdom and cultural narratives in character education. By analyzing traditional tales and folklore, these researchers demonstrate how characters in such narratives provide moral lessons relevant to contemporary education. This framework enriches character education by grounding it in culturally resonant stories, thereby enhancing students' connection to their heritage and ethical values.

Narrative analysis of character arcs

Narrative analysis frameworks examine the structural components of storytelling, including character arcs and thematic development. Puspita et al (2019) utilize this approach to uncover how literary techniques contribute to the internalization of character values. Through detailed analysis of poems and storytelling methods, they reveal how narrative elements evoke emotional responses and foster reflection, making literature an effective medium for character education.

Effectiveness of literature as a medium for character education

Literature uniquely combines emotional engagement with cognitive challenge, making it an exceptionally effective medium for internalizing and expressing character education values. As Puspita et al (2019) emphasize, literature allows exploration of complex moral dilemmas within relatable narrative contexts, encouraging students to actively reflect on their values and decisions. Through character identification, readers empathize with protagonists facing ethical challenges, which promotes deeper understanding and personal growth.

Different narrative techniques—such as character-driven plots, moral conflicts, and culturally embedded themes—serve to reinforce key values like religiosity, integrity, and empathy. These techniques not only enrich the literary experience but also facilitate the development of critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills. Consequently, literature serves as both a mirror and a guide, reflecting societal norms while encouraging readers to internalize and apply character education principles in their own lives.

3.4 The impact of literary methods on character education in Indonesian Islamic higher education

I have completed a detailed academic write-up of Results Section 3.4, focusing exclusively on the impact of literary methods on character education within Indonesian Islamic higher education. This section is structured into five clear sub-sections to ensure logical flow and comprehensive coverage of the topic:

3.4.1 Student motivations for using novels in character education

Students are primarily motivated to use novels as a medium for religious and moral education because of the relatability and engagement that narrative forms provide. Novels allow students to see themselves in the characters and situations, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of complex moral dilemmas (Isabella et al. 2024). This engagement makes novels an effective tool for imparting core values such as honesty, courage, and self-discipline.

Sandberg (2020) highlights the importance of integrating generational goals within religious education, noting that when students connect with the moral complexities portrayed in literary narratives, they are more inclined to reflect on and internalize their own values. This connection bridges academic learning with personal experience, facilitating a profound comprehension of moral teachings and religious perspectives.

Moreover, novels often depict characters undergoing significant moral growth and facing challenges that encourage students to explore their faith and values in a nuanced way. This motivational aspect sustains engagement with character education by aligning with students' lived experiences and spiritual development.

3.4.2 Academic and personal development through literary writing

Engagement with literary writing significantly contributes to both academic and personal development. Academically, creative writing enhances language skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and composition techniques, which are essential for effective communication (Ali et al. 2023). Writing about complex ethical and moral issues through literary forms also encourages critical thinking and analytical skills, leading to improved academic performance.

On a personal level, literary writing serves as a conduit for self-exploration and emotional growth. Students report that storytelling helps them process experiences and express thoughts on relationships, spirituality, and personal challenges (Syahputra and Wiza 2023). This reflective practice cultivates self-awareness and a sense of agency over their narrative identities, which are integral to character formation.

Furthermore, literary writing fosters creativity and critical engagement with moral themes. Creating narratives or characters based on ethical dilemmas sharpens students' analytical abilities and moral reasoning (Rhamadani, Wennyta and Dinata

2021). This creative engagement enriches academic experience and supports the development of a well-rounded character.

3.4.3 Creative writing's role in moral exploration

Creative writing encourages students to explore moral and ethical issues deeply. The narratives they create often involve moral dilemmas that stimulate critical reflection on their beliefs and values. This process helps students navigate personal and social challenges by fostering empathy and ethical understanding.

Research shows that creative writing empowers students to express complex feelings and moral values, allowing them to examine their identities more closely. It also promotes collaboration and community building, as students share their works and discuss character behaviors and ethical scenarios, enhancing interpersonal skills and empathy (Deng and Song 2023).

3.4.4 The impact of digital platforms on writing education

The integration of digital platforms, such as blogs and online forums, has transformed creative writing education by enabling students to share their works widely and engage with broader audiences (Elsawi 2020). This public engagement enhances the learning experience by providing feedback, fostering motivation, and encouraging continuous improvement.

Digital platforms also facilitate the incorporation of student-generated content into academic curricula, supporting the pedagogical value of creative writing. Studies by Gilbert (2016) advocate for the inclusion of creative writing courses in higher education, emphasizing their role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and ethical understanding.

3.4.5 Language proficiency development through creative writing

Creative writing significantly improves students' language proficiency. It enhances vocabulary growth, grammatical understanding, and overall language fluency by encouraging experimentation with language and styles (Bingöl 2023). This mastery of linguistic skills is crucial for effective communication and academic success.

Moreover, creative writing serves as a vehicle for self-expression, allowing students to explore their thoughts and emotions, which contributes to character development. Forsell, Nyholm and Koskinen (2021) found that students engaging in creative writing often experience reductions in emotional distress and gain better emotional regulation, further supporting their personal growth.

Thus, this can demonstrate that literary methods, especially student-generated novels and creative writing, play a vital role in character education within Indonesian Islamic higher education. They motivate students through relatable narratives, foster academic and personal development, encourage moral exploration, leverage digital platforms for enhanced learning, and improve language proficiency. These findings underscore the importance of integrating literary techniques into character education strategies to cultivate well-rounded, morally grounded students.

4. Discussion

4.1 Synergy between literature and character education in Indonesian Islamic contexts

The integration of literature and character education within Indonesian Islamic educational settings reveals a profound synergy that enriches both linguistic and moral development. Literature serves not only as a medium for language acquisition but also as a conduit for ethical and cultural values, fostering students' holistic growth. This synergy is particularly evident in contexts where Islamic themes and values are embedded within literary texts, creating an educational experience that nurtures students' ethical and moral understanding (Isroani and Huda 2022). The use of culturally and religiously relevant narratives enables students to engage deeply with their heritage, promoting a sense of identity and belonging that is essential for character formation. Such integration aligns with the broader educational goals of Indonesian Islamic institutions, which emphasize the cultivation of religiosity alongside academic proficiency.

4.2 The role of Islamic-themed literature in shaping moral understanding

Islamic-themed literature plays a pivotal role in shaping students' moral frameworks by providing narratives that exemplify virtues such as integrity, empathy, and responsibility. These texts often incorporate religious teachings and cultural practices that resonate with students' lived experiences, thereby facilitating internalization of character values (Suparjo and Hidayah 2023). The didactic nature of Islamic literature allows students to explore moral dilemmas and ethical lessons within a familiar cultural and religious context, enhancing their capacity for critical reflection and ethical reasoning. Moreover, the inclusion of local wisdom and cultural narratives within these texts further contextualizes character education, fostering a sense of community and social responsibility (Mawadda, Anwar and Jatmiko 2024). This culturally grounded approach ensures that character education is not abstract but intimately connected to students' identities and social realities.

4.3 Impact of literary methods on character development

The employment of literary methods in character education has demonstrated significant positive impacts on students' moral and ethical growth. Through engagement with literary texts—whether through reading, analysis, or creative writing—students develop critical thinking skills and emotional intelligence that underpin character development (Idris 2023). Student-generated literature, such as Arabic novels authored by learners, serves as a powerful pedagogical tool that encourages self-expression and moral exploration (Milah et al. 2023). These creative outputs reflect societal themes and religious principles, enabling students to articulate their values and beliefs while fostering a deeper understanding of character education objectives. Furthermore, literary methods promote empathy by allowing students to inhabit diverse perspectives and grapple with complex moral issues, thereby enhancing their ethical reasoning and social awareness.

4.4 Curriculum design implications based on student literary production

Insights derived from student literary production offer valuable implications for curriculum design and pedagogical strategies. Analyzing students' written works reveals the character values that resonate most strongly with learners, providing a basis for thematic integration into language curricula (Sujiatmoko et al. 2023). For instance, the implementation of genre-specific writing modules, such as short story-based curricula, has been shown to enhance both linguistic proficiency and moral development by embedding ethical lessons within creative assignments (Abdulqader et al. 2023). Such curricula allow students to explore character education values through creative means, bridging content with ethical discussions.

Additionally, integrating 21st-century skills into literary writing projects promotes not only language skill development but also encourages cooperation, communication, creativity, and critical thinking among students (Jupri et al., 2024). This multifaceted approach ensures that the curriculum addresses both educational standards and character development objectives. Leveraging student literary outputs for group discussions and peer reviews further promotes a collaborative learning environment, where reflective dialogue around moral themes reinforces character education.

4.5 Limitations and challenges in qualitative research on student-generated literature

Despite the promising findings, qualitative studies focusing on student-generated literature for character development face several limitations. One common issue is the subjective nature of qualitative research, where findings can be influenced by researchers' interpretations, potentially introducing bias (El-Mahdy, Qoura and El-Hadidy 2019). Additionally, variability in students' prior experiences and writing abilities may skew results, complicating the generalizability of findings. Differences in cultural backgrounds and educational contexts also pose challenges in standardizing research outcomes.

Moreover, the complexity of measuring character development through literary outputs requires careful methodological design to ensure validity and reliability. These challenges highlight the need for triangulation of data sources and mixed-method approaches to strengthen the robustness of research in this field.

The discussion clearly demonstrates that literature, especially when embedded with Islamic themes and local wisdom, is a powerful vehicle for character education in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Literary methods not only enhance language skills but also foster moral reasoning, empathy, and ethical awareness. Student-generated literature provides rich insights for curriculum development, promoting a holistic educational approach that integrates character formation with academic learning. However, researchers must navigate methodological challenges inherent in qualitative studies to ensure credible and impactful findings.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Main findings

This study has provided a comprehensive examination of the role of literary methods in character education within Indonesian Islamic higher education. The key findings reveal that literature, especially when infused with Islamic themes and local cultural wisdom, serves as a powerful medium for fostering students' moral and ethical development alongside their linguistic skills. Student-generated literary works, such as Arabic novels and creative writing, not only enhance language proficiency but also promote critical thinking, empathy, and self-expression, which are essential components of character formation.

The research also highlights the significant synergy between literature and character education, where literary texts act as conduits for internalizing values such as integrity, responsibility, and social awareness. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of curriculum design that integrates literary methods with character education goals, emphasizing genre-specific writing and 21st-century skills to create a holistic learning environment.

5.2 Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of literature and character education, particularly within the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. It demonstrates how culturally and religiously relevant literary content can deepen students' moral understanding and ethical reasoning, thereby enriching existing educational frameworks.

Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers. By leveraging student literary production, educators can tailor curricula to better address character education objectives while simultaneously enhancing language skills. The integration of collaborative activities such as peer reviews and group discussions around literary works fosters a supportive environment for moral reflection and social learning.

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

While the study provides meaningful insights, it is not without limitations. The qualitative nature of the research introduces subjectivity, and variations in students' backgrounds and writing abilities may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, measuring character development through literary outputs remains methodologically challenging.

Future research could address these limitations by employing mixed-method approaches and expanding the scope to include diverse educational contexts. Further studies might also explore the long-term impact of literary methods on character education outcomes and investigate the role of digital and multimedia literary forms in enhancing moral development.

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