



Faith-Based Character Education in Islamic Schools: The Influence of Understanding Faith in Allah on Students' Religious Character

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ABSTRACT

Character education in Islamic schools depends not only on students' knowledge of religious doctrine but also on the extent to which faith becomes an internal moral orientation. This study examined the relationship between understanding faith in Allah and the formation of religious character among Grade VIII students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri Model Kota Palopo, Indonesia. The study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in which quantitative evidence was collected first and then elaborated through qualitative data. All 35 students in Class VIII A were included. Quantitative data were obtained through a Likert-scale questionnaire covering faith-related indicators of tawhid, mahabbah, khauf, tawakkul, and taqwa, and religious-character indicators including sincerity, honesty, discipline, and obedience to rules. Observation, interviews with a teacher and selected students, and documentation were used to explain the survey findings. Descriptively, 31.42% of students were classified as having good understanding of faith in Allah, 51.42% as adequate, and 17.14% as low. Religious character was reported as good for 48.57% of students, adequate for 28.57%, and low for 22.85%. The original quantitative analysis reported a chi-square value of 4.599 and a contingency coefficient of 0.340, indicating a low-strength relationship under the thesis analytical framework. Qualitative findings showed that faith understanding was expressed through muraqabah-based honesty, personal responsibility, worship discipline, resilience, and social care, while teacher modeling, habituation, school climate, and family support strengthened character formation. The findings suggest that understanding faith in Allah contributes to religious character, but it should be treated as one element within a broader school-based character-education system rather than as a single determinant.

Keywords: Faith in Allah, Religious Character, Character Education, Aqidah Akhlak, Islamic School.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period in which moral judgment, identity, emotional regulation, and social behavior are still being consolidated. Within Islamic education, this developmental condition makes character formation inseparable from the cultivation of faith. Education is therefore expected to provide not only knowledge but also a normative and spiritual framework through which students interpret choices and regulate conduct. Baderiah (2015) emphasizes that Islamic education should connect knowledge, action, and faith so that learning is expressed in morally responsible behavior rather than remaining at the level of cognition.

Faith in Islamic educational thought is not limited to verbal confession. It is understood as conviction in the heart, expression through speech, and realization through action. The pillars of faith provide the doctrinal foundation of Islamic belief, while the present study operationalizes the independent variable more specifically as students' understanding of faith in Allah. This focus is pedagogically important because belief in Allah is expected to shape an internal awareness that human action is morally accountable even when external supervision is absent. Studies on aqidah education similarly argue that understanding faith should be connected to ethical conduct and the formation of akhlak, particularly in an environment where young people face strong social and digital influences (Attaqwa et al., 2025; Suryani et al., 2021).

The educational challenge arises when religious understanding and everyday behavior do not develop at the same pace. Students may be able to repeat doctrinal content while still showing weak discipline, dishonesty, irresponsible behavior, or inconsistency in observing school rules. This gap between moral knowing and moral action has become increasingly important as students encounter digital media, peer influence, academic pressure, and changing family and community patterns. Tufando (2024) notes that character education within the national curriculum can face uneven implementation, while Musrifah (2016) stresses that character is formed through sustained interaction between personal dispositions and the environments in which students grow.

For Islamic schools and madrasahs, religious character is therefore both an instructional and institutional concern. Religious character refers to patterns of thought, speech, and action that are consistently aligned with religious values. Wibowo (2012) describes religious character through obedience to religious teaching, tolerance in religious life, and harmonious social relations. In the thesis on which this article is based, the operational indicators of religious character were narrowed to sincerity, honesty, discipline, and obedience to rules. These indicators are especially relevant to the daily management of student life because they are visible in learning routines, compliance with school expectations, interaction with teachers and peers, and personal responsibility.

Character formation is also influenced by the way religious values are organized within the school environment. Teacher modeling, repeated habituation, a supportive school climate, and coordination with families can turn religious instruction from episodic content into a consistent culture. Zahi (2023) positions the Aqidah Akhlak teacher as a central model in strengthening student morals, while Musbikin (2019) highlights the importance of repeated value reinforcement in character education. In this sense, the effectiveness of faith-based character education cannot be understood only from classroom scores; it also requires attention to the institutional routines through which values are demonstrated and practiced.

Previous studies provide evidence that Islamic religious education is related to multiple dimensions of student character, but the evidence remains fragmented. Azizah (2019) reported a positive relationship between religious character and work character among vocational students. Anggraini (2022) found that Aqidah Akhlak learning was associated with student discipline, while Hardianti (2020) reported a strong relationship between Aqidah Akhlak learning outcomes and Muslim dress ethics. Ainayah (2021) examined its influence on social behavior, and Kurniawati (2019) reported that Islamic Religious Education explained part of the variance in student character. These studies collectively support the relevance of religious learning to character formation, but they do not specifically explain how students' understanding of faith in Allah relates to religious character in an Islamic junior secondary school.

The present study addresses that gap at MTsN Model Kota Palopo, an Islamic junior secondary school whose institutional vision emphasizes achievement, faith, technology, culture, and Islamic character. The madrasah also develops religious routines, discipline, Qur'an reading, and mental-spiritual guidance. Such a setting offers a meaningful context for examining whether understanding faith in Allah is reflected in students' character and how teachers and the school environment help translate doctrinal understanding into everyday behavior.

Accordingly, this study examines three questions: (1) what is the level of students' understanding of faith in Allah; (2) what is the level of students' religious character; and (3) how are understanding faith in Allah and religious character related in the Grade VIII context at MTsN Model Kota Palopo? In addition to the quantitative relationship, qualitative data are used to explain how faith understanding is expressed through honesty, responsibility, discipline, resilience, and social care, and what this implies for school-based character education.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase was given priority and was conducted first to describe students' understanding of faith in Allah, describe their religious character, and examine the relationship between the two variables. The qualitative phase followed through interviews, observation, and documentation to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative patterns. This sequence follows the logic of sequential mixed methods

described in the thesis through the methodological frameworks of Sugiyono (2011) and Creswell (2016).

The research was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri Model Kota Palopo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The quantitative population consisted of 35 students in Class VIII A, and all members of this class were included in the study. Although the thesis discusses several sampling concepts, the implemented sample corresponds to a saturated or census approach because the entire listed Class VIII A population was used as the quantitative sample.

The main quantitative instrument was a closed Likert-scale questionnaire. Understanding faith in Allah was operationalized through five indicators: tawhid or affirming the oneness of Allah, mahabbah or love of Allah, khauf or reverential fear, tawakkul or reliance on Allah, and taqwa. Religious character was operationalized through sincerity, honesty, discipline, and obedience to rules. The instrument used four response categories ranging from highly appropriate to highly inappropriate, with reverse scoring for unfavorable statements. The study also used participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with the Aqidah Akhlak teacher and selected students, and documentary evidence to clarify how the measured values appeared in school life.

Quantitative analysis first classified the survey scores into good, adequate, and low categories. The thesis then used a chi-square procedure to examine the categorical relationship between understanding faith in Allah and religious character and calculated a contingency coefficient to describe the strength of the relationship. Qualitative material was analyzed reflectively through deductive and inductive reasoning, with attention to recurring explanations concerning moral self-control, worship discipline, responsibility, social behavior, teacher example, habituation, and support from the school and family environments.

Because the study examined one class in one madrasah and relied substantially on self-report questionnaire data, the results are interpreted as context-specific. In addition, the relationship measure is treated as associative rather than causal. The qualitative phase is used to explain how the variables may be connected in practice, not to establish an independent causal effect.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Students' Understanding of Faith in Allah

The quantitative results show that students' understanding of faith in Allah was concentrated in the adequate category. Scores ranged from 30 to 39. Of the 35 participants, 11 students (31.42%) were classified in the good category, 18 students (51.42%) in the adequate category, and 6 students (17.14%) in the low category. The distribution indicates that the majority of students possessed a functional but not uniformly strong understanding of the faith indicators used in the study. The qualitative evidence clarifies that the intended meaning of faith extended beyond memorization:

students and teachers described it as awareness of Allah's presence, dependence on Allah, worship discipline, gratitude, and responsibility in daily conduct.

Table 1
Distribution of Students' Understanding of Faith in Allah

Score Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
36-39	Good	11	31.42%
33-35	Adequate	18	51.42%
30-32	Low	6	17.14%
Total		35	100%

2. Students' Religious Character

Religious character was reported at a higher categorical level than faith understanding. The thesis classified 17 students (48.57%) as having good religious character, 10 students (28.57%) as adequate, and 8 students (22.85%) as low. The character variable was represented by sincerity, honesty, discipline, and obedience to rules. Interview data expanded these indicators by describing behaviors such as completing responsibilities without constant supervision, avoiding cheating, respecting teachers and peers, participating in religious routines, and showing social concern. These accounts portray religious character as a pattern of internalized conduct rather than a set of isolated religious activities.

Table 2
Distribution of Students' Religious Character

Score Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
36-41	Good	17	48.57%
34-35	Adequate	10	28.57%
29-33	Low	8	22.85%
Total		35	100%

3. Relationship between Faith Understanding and Religious Character

The thesis used categorical cross-tabulation to examine the relationship between understanding faith in Allah and religious character. The original analysis reported a chi-square value of 4.599. It also calculated a contingency coefficient of 0.340. Under the interpretive scale used in the thesis, a coefficient between 0.200 and 0.400 was classified as low. Accordingly, the most defensible substantive reading is that faith understanding and religious character were related only weakly within this sample. The result does not support treating faith understanding as the sole explanation for character formation; rather, it suggests that faith understanding operates together with other personal, instructional, family, peer, and institutional influences.

Table 3
Summary of the Reported Relationship Analysis

Measure	Reported Value	Interpretation Used in This Article
Chi-square	4.599	Association was examined through categorical cross-tabulation.
Contingency coefficient (C)	0.340	Low-strength relationship under the thesis coefficient scale.
Sample size	35	One Grade VIII class in a single Islamic junior secondary school.

4. Qualitative Explanations of Character Formation

The qualitative findings help explain why a theological construct may be connected to observable student behavior. The strongest recurring theme was *muraqabah*, or the awareness that Allah sees and knows human actions. This awareness was described as a basis for honesty even when teachers were not directly supervising students. A second theme was responsibility: time, learning opportunities, and personal ability were framed as trusts that should be used properly. A third theme concerned discipline and resilience, including regular worship, compliance with school routines, patience when facing academic difficulty, and *tawakkul* after making an effort. A fourth theme was social care, expressed through respect, avoidance of bullying, willingness to help peers, and participation in social activities.

Table 4
Qualitative Themes Linking Faith Understanding and Religious Character

Theme	Expression in Student Life	School-Based Reinforcement
Muraqabah and honesty	Avoiding cheating and dishonesty even without direct supervision.	Teacher example, ethical reminders, reflective dialogue.
Responsibility and discipline	Completing tasks, obeying rules, punctuality, and treating learning as an amanah.	Habituation, consistent routines, accountability.
Resilience and tawakkul	Continuing effort after setbacks and accepting outcomes without giving up.	Spiritual guidance, supportive teacher interaction.
Social care	Respecting others, helping peers, avoiding bullying, and participating in social activities.	School climate, cooperative activities, family-school reinforcement.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that understanding faith in Allah has educational meaning when it moves from doctrinal recognition to an internal framework for self-regulation. The dominant adequate category for faith understanding suggests that most students were not starting from an absence of religious knowledge; rather, they were positioned

at an intermediate level in which belief had been learned but still required deeper internalization. This distinction is important in Islamic character education because knowing that Allah is One, loving Allah, fearing moral accountability, relying on Allah, and practicing taqwa are expected to shape the motives that precede behavior. Attaqwa et al. (2025) similarly argue that faith in Allah is central to the formation of aqidah and akhlak, while Suryani et al. (2021) emphasize that the pillars of faith should function as a lived foundation rather than as memorized doctrine.

The qualitative theme of muraqabah provides the clearest mechanism connecting faith understanding to character. When students understand that moral action remains accountable beyond human surveillance, honesty can become internally motivated. This helps explain why the interview material repeatedly connected faith with avoiding cheating, admitting mistakes, and maintaining integrity when teachers are absent. Such a mechanism is consistent with the broader Islamic educational view that faith is verified through action. Baderiah (2015) positions Islamic education as a process that should unite knowledge, practice, and spiritual commitment, and Kasmali (2015) similarly links aqidah education with the formation of akhlak.

Religious character in the study was strongest at the descriptive level, with nearly half of the participants classified as good. The qualitative material shows that this character was not limited to ritual practice. It included discipline, obedience to rules, responsibility, social care, and respectful relationships. This is consistent with Wibowo's (2012) conception of religious character as obedience to religious teaching accompanied by harmonious social behavior. It also supports Musbikin's (2019) emphasis on character education as a process that combines knowledge of values with repeated practice until those values become habitual patterns of conduct.

The results also reinforce the importance of teacher behavior and institutional routines. The interviews portray teachers not merely as transmitters of Aqidah Akhlak content but as visible models whose patience, honesty, discipline, and interpersonal conduct help students interpret what religious values look like in practice. Zahiq (2023) similarly highlights the role of the Aqidah Akhlak teacher in improving student morals. In the context of educational administration and school leadership, this finding implies that character education requires consistency across classroom instruction, routines, staff behavior, counseling, worship activities, and communication with families. The study did not directly measure leadership practices, so this should be understood as an institutional implication of the findings rather than as a tested management effect.

The low contingency coefficient is equally important. A coefficient of 0.340 indicates that the relationship between faith understanding and religious character was present only at a low level under the thesis interpretation. This prevents an overly simple conclusion that better theological understanding automatically produces stronger character. The thesis itself identifies multiple influences on character, including family, school, community, age, personality, and psychological conditions. Musrifah (2016) and Abdul Aziz (2018) likewise describe character formation as a product of both internal and external factors. The result therefore supports a multi-factor model in which understanding faith in Allah may provide a moral foundation, but the translation of that

foundation into stable behavior depends on reinforcement from the environments in which students live.

This multi-factor interpretation helps situate the study within previous empirical work. Azizah (2019) found that religious character explained only part of the variation in vocational students' work character, while Kurniawati (2019) likewise reported that Islamic Religious Education explained a limited share of overall character variance. Anggraini (2022), Hardianti (2020), and Ainayah (2021) each identified relationships between Aqidah Akhlak learning and specific behavioral outcomes, including discipline, dress ethics, and social behavior. The current study extends this line of inquiry by focusing not on the entire subject of Islamic Religious Education but on the more specific construct of understanding faith in Allah and by using qualitative evidence to explain how students and teachers interpret its behavioral meaning.

The stage model described in the qualitative findings also offers a useful explanation for why character development may be uneven even among students who receive similar religious instruction. Students may initially imitate teachers or parents, later identify with admired figures, and only gradually internalize religious values so that behavior becomes stable without external supervision. This progression from imitation to identification and internalization shows why a one-time lesson cannot be expected to produce durable character. Repetition, reflection, consistent modeling, and opportunities for responsible action are needed for faith concepts to become part of students' personal moral identity.

For Islamic schools, the practical implication is to manage faith-based character education as a coordinated ecosystem. Aqidah Akhlak lessons can provide the conceptual foundation, but school routines should create opportunities to practice honesty, discipline, responsibility, worship, social care, and respectful interaction. Teachers across subjects can reinforce common ethical language; counseling can connect emotional challenges with constructive spiritual reflection; and family communication can help maintain consistency between school and home. These implications are aligned with the interview expectation that the madrasah function as a "laboratory of faith" in which curriculum, example, habit, and social experience support one another.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within clear limitations. The sample involved only 35 students from a single Grade VIII class in one madrasah. The quantitative component depended on categorical self-report data, and the thesis analytical tables contain limitations that make strong causal or population-level claims inappropriate. The qualitative data provide valuable contextual explanation but do not independently establish causality. Future studies should involve multiple classes or schools, use validated multi-dimensional instruments, examine teacher and family variables directly, and apply stronger correlational or multivariate analysis to estimate the relative contribution of faith understanding alongside other determinants of religious character.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that understanding faith in Allah and religious character are connected in the educational experience of Grade VIII students at MTsN Model Kota Palopo, but the relationship is not strong enough to justify a single-factor explanation of character formation. Most students were classified as having an adequate understanding of faith in Allah, whereas religious character was most frequently classified as good. The thesis reported a chi-square value of 4.599 and a contingency coefficient of 0.340; the latter indicates a low-strength association under the analytical scale used. Qualitative evidence explains the relationship through internal moral awareness, especially *muraqabah*, responsibility, discipline, resilience, and social care.

The educational implication is that faith-based character formation should be organized as a school-wide process. *Aqidah Akhlak* instruction can provide a theological and moral foundation, but character becomes more stable when it is reinforced by teacher modeling, habituation, consistent rules, supportive relationships, reflective learning, and cooperation with families. Because this study was limited to one class and relied heavily on self-report data, further research should use broader samples and stronger quantitative models while directly examining the contribution of school climate, teacher practice, peer relations, and family support to religious character development.

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