

RESEARCH

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Development of a Religious Character Education Model through the Tahfizh Al-Qur'an Program in Musi Rawas

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Abstract

This study aims to develop a religious character education model through the Tahfizh Al-Qur'an program implemented at Rumah Tahfizh Al-Qur'an in Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The study addresses the need for an effective model of religious character education in nonformal Islamic educational institutions. A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving 15 purposively selected informants, consisting of three Rumah Tahfizh leaders, five tahfizh teachers (ustadz/ustadzah), and seven students. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that religious character is developed through a gradual process from externally motivated behaviour to internalized moral awareness. This process is supported by religious habituation, teacher role modelling, structured tahfizh activities, and a conducive religious environment. The findings support Lickona's character education theory, An-Nahlawi's habituation approach, and Edward III's policy implementation framework. Based on these findings, this study proposes a context-specific model of religious character education for nonformal Islamic educational institutions. The proposed model provides practical guidance for strengthening religious character development in Rumah Tahfizh and other Islamic educational settings.

Keywords: Habituation; Religious character; Tahfizh program.

Introduction

The developments of the 21st century, marked by technological disruption, moral crises, and rapid social changes, have driven a shift in the global education paradigm from a focus on academic achievement to the enhancement of holistic competencies (Mardela et al., 2026). Education is no longer sufficiently focused on cognitive aspects alone; it must also integrate affective dimensions and values as the foundation for character development. Global educational policy frameworks emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in shaping individuals who are both adaptive and possess integrity (OECD, 2022).

In this context, Islamic education occupies a strategic position, as it has historically prioritized the cultivation of moral character as a primary objective. Islamic education functions not only as a process of knowledge transfer but also as a mechanism for internalizing Islamic values that shape students' character (Siddik, 2024). Religious character constitutes a fundamental aspect

in developing individuals who are disciplined, responsible, and possess integrity in social life (Lickona, T., Schaps, E., & Lewis, 2018). One of the approaches that has emerged in strengthening religious character is through Tahfizh Al-Qur'an programs, which are not only focused on memorization skills but also encompass the habituation of worship, muraja'ah (revision of memorized Quranic verses), and the role modeling provided by educators (Saepudin et al., 2023).

In practice, Rumah Tahfizh, as a nonformal Islamic educational institution, plays a crucial role in creating a religious environment that supports the continuous internalization of Islamic values. In Musi Rawas Regency, Rumah Tahfizh institutions have expanded significantly, serving 2,847 students across 14 sub-districts and 186 villages (Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Musi Rawas Regency, 2024). This rapid expansion reflects the increasing role of Rumah Tahfizh in providing community-based nonformal Islamic education. However, preliminary field observations conducted during the initial stage of this study revealed considerable variations in curriculum implementation, teaching methods, evaluation practices, and teachers' educational backgrounds across institutions. These findings indicate that the rapid expansion of Rumah Tahfizh has not yet been accompanied by a systematic and integrated approach to religious character education. Consequently, there is a need to develop a context-specific model that provides a structured framework for implementing religious character education in nonformal Islamic educational institutions.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that Tahfizh Al-Qur'an programs contribute to the development of students' religious character by fostering discipline, responsibility, patience, and other Islamic values (Kucharský et al., 2024). In addition, studies on Islamic education have highlighted the significant roles of religious habituation and teachers' role modeling in promoting moral behaviour and value internalization among students (Siddik, 2024). While these studies demonstrate the positive contribution of Tahfizh education, they primarily describe the outcomes of character development rather than explaining how religious values are internalized through the interaction of multiple educational components. Furthermore, previous research has generally examined habituation, role modeling (Sholikah et al., 2025), Tahfizh activities, and the religious environment as separate aspects, without integrating them into a comprehensive conceptual framework. Consequently, a context-specific and integrated model is still needed to explain how these interconnected components collectively shape students' religious character in nonformal Islamic educational institutions.

Recent studies indicate that the development of religious character cannot be separated from the process of value internalization, which occurs systematically and continuously. Research published in reputable international journals has shown that value-based and spirituality-oriented education has a significant impact on shaping students' moral behavior and self-regulation (Walker & Thoma, 2017). In the context of Islamic education, the approach of habituation and role modeling has been proven effective in shaping students' moral character, while a religious educational environment reinforces the process of value internalization through social interaction and institutional culture (Faisal, 2023). However, a model capable of integrating all these components into a systematic framework is still needed.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study addresses the limitations of previous Tahfizh-based character education studies. While earlier studies have primarily examined the effects of Tahfizh programs or individual aspects of character education, such as religious habituation, teacher role modeling, or the religious environment, they have not explained how these components interact within a unified framework to foster students' religious character (Fathi et al., 2025). Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in the development of a context-specific integrated

model that systematically combines religious habituation, Tahfizh activities, teacher role modeling, and the religious environment into a coherent process of religious value internalization in Rumah Tahfizh. This model provides a conceptual framework for understanding how these interconnected components collectively contribute to sustainable religious character development in nonformal Islamic educational institutions.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the tahfizh program in the Musi Rawas tahfizh houses, examine the process of students' religious character development within the program, and develop an integrated, systematic, and contextual model of religious character formation through the tahfizh program in Musi Rawas Regency. The study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic education models based on religious character, as well as practical contributions for tahfizh institutions in designing more effective, structured, and sustainable character development systems.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at developing a conceptual model of students' religious character formation through the Qur'an Memorization (Tahfizh) Program. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of religious character development within its real-life context, particularly the interaction among Qur'anic memorization activities, religious habituation, educators' role modelling, parental support, and the religious learning environment as an integrated system.

The conceptual model was developed inductively from empirical findings through four stages. First, data were collected through participant observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis to capture participants' experiences and institutional practices related to religious character development. Second, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving data reduction, open coding, categorization, and the identification of recurring themes. Third, the resulting themes were synthesized into conceptual components representing the essential elements of the Tahfizh-based character education process, while the relationships among these components were examined to construct a preliminary conceptual model. Finally, the preliminary model was refined and validated through source triangulation and member checking with selected participants to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

The research was conducted in Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The site was selected because of the rapid development of Rumah Tahfizh institutions across 14 sub districts and 186 villages, serving approximately 2,847 students. This widespread presence demonstrates that Rumah Tahfizh has become an important component of the non-formal Islamic education ecosystem, making the setting particularly relevant for developing a conceptual model of religious character formation. The study was conducted over a period of approximately five months.

The research informants were selected using purposive sampling (Suriani et al., 2023). Based on criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. A total of 54 informants participated in this research, comprising 12 heads of Rumah Tahfizh, 18 tahfizh instructors (ustadz/ustadzah), and 24 students from 12 Rumah Tahfizh representing three sub districts in Musi Rawas Regency, namely Tugumulyo, Megang Sakti, and Muara Beliti. The heads of Rumah Tahfizh were selected based on their active membership in the Lembaga Pembina Rumah Tahfizh (LPRT). The ustadz/ustadzah were selected because they were actively teaching in the Tahfizh Program and had either won Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) competitions or were members of Ittihadul Huffaz. Student participants were selected based on their active participation in the Tahfizh Program for at least one year. They were 5–12 years old, represented the elementary school level, and had memorized

between 1 and 8 juz, with the highest memorization achievement found at Rumah Tahfizh Masjid Agung Darussalam Muara Beliti. These selection criteria were intended to ensure that all participants possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding the implementation of the Tahfizh Program and the process of students' religious character development.

Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis over a period of approximately five months. Each observation session lasted at least 60 minutes and focused on Tahfizh learning activities, *muraja'ah*, religious habituation, and social interactions reflecting the internalization of religious values. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the heads of the Rumah Tahfizh, ustadz/ustadzah, and students. A total of 54 interview sessions were conducted, with each of the 54 informants participating in one interview session. The interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability and explored four main themes: (1) the implementation of the Tahfizh Program, (2) strategies for fostering students' religious character, (3) supporting and inhibiting factors, and (4) the perceived impact of the Tahfizh Program on students' religious character. Document analysis complemented the data through institutional profiles, activity archives, Tahfizh program schedules, students' memorization records, and other institutional documents. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and systematically coded during the data analysis process.

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and method triangulation to confirm consistency across different informants and data collection techniques. Additionally, *member checks* were conducted to verify the accuracy of the data with the information provided by the informants.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and systematically coded through open coding, categorization, and theme development (Qiao et al., 2025).

The analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection to identify recurring themes related to religious character development. The development of the conceptual model involved four stages. First, the empirical data were coded and categorized into themes representing Tahfizh activities, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, and the religious environment. Second, relationships among these themes were identified through thematic interpretation to explain the process of religious value internalization. Third, the interconnected themes were synthesized into the main components of the proposed conceptual model. Finally, the model was refined through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking to ensure that it accurately reflected the empirical findings.

Results

Observations showed that students routinely participated in congregational prayers, *muraja'ah*, Qur'anic memorization, and daily religious habituation before and after Tahfizh learning sessions.

One ustadz stated: *"We begin by teaching students to pray in congregation, review their memorization every day, and respect their teachers and parents. These practices gradually become their daily habits."*

Another ustadz emphasized:

"Memorizing the Qur'an influences students' character only when it is accompanied by good habits. Even if students memorize the Qur'an, without purifying the heart and continuously practicing good deeds, the memorization alone will not shape good character."

The findings indicate that the development of religious character through the Rumah Tahfizh

Al-Qur'an program occurs not only at the formal level but is also internalized in students' everyday practices. This underscores that character formation is more effective when values are not merely taught but are directly experienced within real social contexts.

The three phases of religious character development were identified through thematic analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes. The "forced" phase was indicated by students' participation in congregational prayers, *muraja'ah*, and Qur'anic memorization primarily because of teachers' instructions and institutional rules. Observation data showed that some students initially joined these activities only after being reminded or directed by their ustadz. The "obliged" phase was characterized by students beginning to participate regularly and showing a sense of responsibility, although occasional reminders were still needed. At this stage, students demonstrated greater consistency in attending religious activities and completing their memorization targets. The "habitual" phase was identified when students voluntarily performed congregational prayers, *muraja'ah*, Qur'anic recitation, and respectful behaviour without direct supervision. This stage was further confirmed by observations showing that, after several months of participation, many students began preparing for congregational prayers and *muraja'ah* without being reminded by their teachers.

One ustadz explained the gradual process of character formation: "At first, the students participate because they are instructed to do so. Over time, they become accustomed to these practices and eventually carry them out on their own initiative."

The findings regarding the "forced, obliged, and habitual" patterns indicate that the development of religious character is a gradual process, progressing from external pressure toward internal awareness.

Table 1 Summary of Themes, Empirical Evidence, and Character Indicators

Theme	Empirical Evidence	Character Indicators
Tahfizh Learning Activities	Students routinely memorize and review Qur'anic verses under teacher supervision.	Discipline, responsibility, perseverance,
Religious Habituation	Students perform congregational prayers, recite the Qur'an, and participate in daily religious activities.	Religiosity, consistency, self-discipline,
Teacher Role Modeling	Teachers demonstrate exemplary behavior and provide continuous guidance and motivation.	Honesty, respect, responsibility
Evaluation and Monitoring	Memorization progress and students' attitudes are assessed regularly through observation and performance evaluation.	Accountability, commitment, self-improvement

As shown in Table 1, religious character development is supported by four interconnected educational components, namely Tahfizh learning activities, religious habituation, teacher role modeling, and continuous evaluation. These components collectively foster discipline, responsibility, religiosity, consistency, honesty, and accountability among students.

In the field, this mechanism is evident in the students' daily routines, where acts of worship and Tahfizh activities are conducted in a structured and repeated manner. The consistency of these activities indicates that value internalization does not occur instantaneously but develops through

continuous social interactions within a supportive environment.

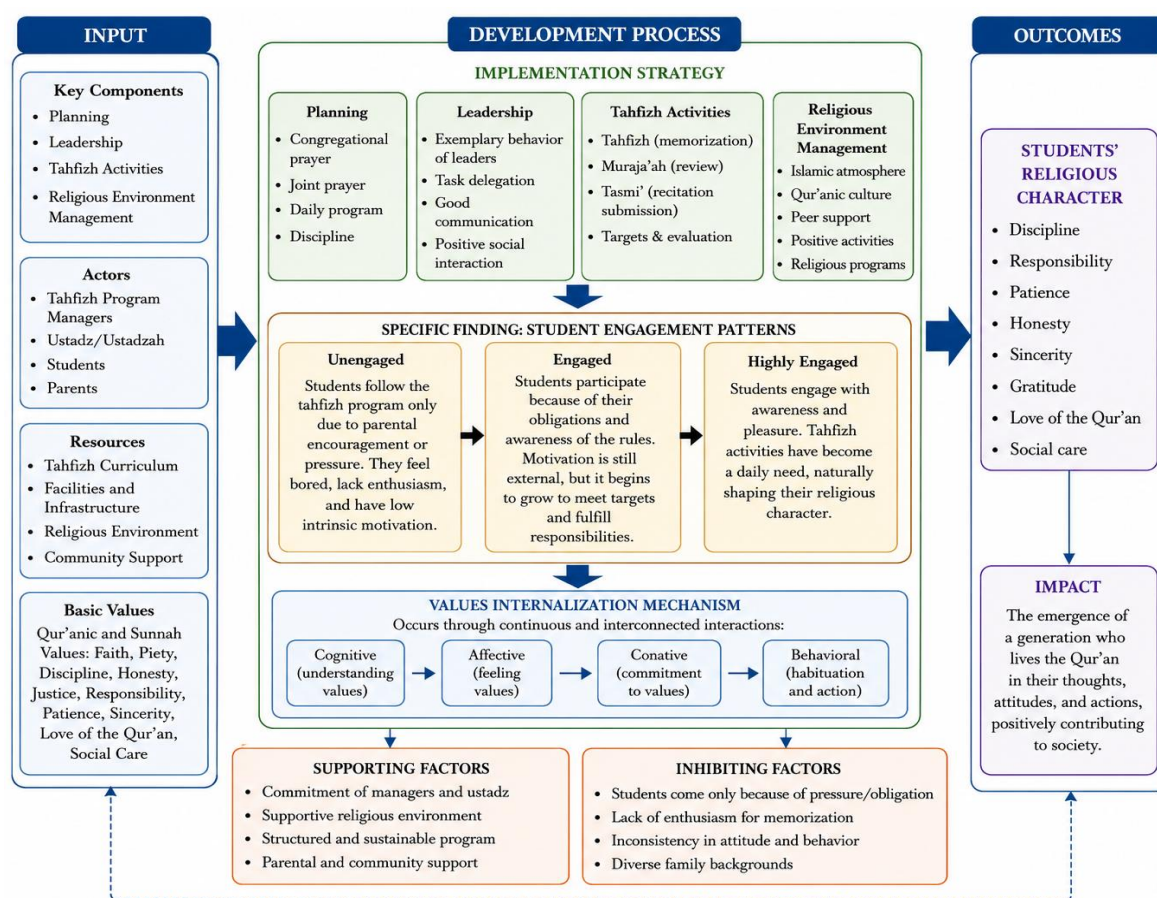


Figure 1 Flow of Religious Character Development Based on the Tahfizh Program in Musi Rawas Regency
Source: Developed by the authors (2026)

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model of religious character development through the Tahfizh Program in Rumah Tahfizh. The model demonstrates that Tahfizh learning activities, religious habituation, teacher role modeling, and a supportive religious environment interact to facilitate the gradual internalization of religious values, leading to the development of students' religious character.

Discussion

The findings regarding the “forced, obliged, and habitual” patterns indicate that the development of religious character is a gradual process, progressing from external pressure toward internal awareness. This pattern reinforces Lickona’s character education theory, which emphasizes the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Ruswinarsih et al., 2022).

In the initial and intermediate phases, students’ behavior is still largely influenced by external control, whereas in the habitual phase, the three aspects are integrated simultaneously. From the perspective of Islamic education, these findings align with An-Nahlawi’s view, which emphasizes the importance of habituation and exemplarity in the formation of moral character (Fathi et al., 2025).

The repetition of religious activities in a conducive environment accelerates behavioral transformation, while the exemplarity of teachers or mentors serves as an effective social imitation model. From the perspective of George C. Edward III’s policy implementation theory, the success of

the program is influenced by four main variables: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Susanto et al., 2023).

All four components work simultaneously to support the systematic and sustainable implementation of the Tahfizh program. From a causal mechanism perspective, the four model components-habit formation, teacher or mentor exemplarity, Tahfizh activities, and religious environment-do not operate independently but form an interconnected flow. Habit formation and exemplarity serve as initial stimuli, Tahfizh activities reinforce routines, and the religious environment acts as a medium that accelerates the internalization of values, ultimately resulting in stable religious character development.

These findings are also consistent with the studies of Raihani and Hidayat, which emphasize the importance of community-based education and a religious environment in strengthening Islamic values (Safriadi et al., 2025). This study extends previous research by showing that the character-building process can begin from external pressures that are pedagogically managed until they develop into deeply ingrained habits.

The transition from compelled participation to habitual engagement can be interpreted more precisely through self-determination theory. The three phases identified in this study should not be viewed as a simple movement from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, because external practices may be internalized at different levels. Initial obedience to schedules and teacher instructions resembles externally regulated behaviour, whereas regular participation may develop into identified regulation when students begin to understand the personal and religious significance of prayer, *muraja'ah*, and Qur'anic memorization. Ryan and Deci (2020) explain that durable internalization is strengthened when educational environments support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the Rumah Tahfizh context, these needs can be supported by explaining the meaning of each routine, setting attainable memorization targets, providing constructive feedback, and building warm relationships between students and educators. Therefore, the habitual phase should not be interpreted merely as automatic repetition; it is educationally stronger when the practice is accompanied by understanding, personal endorsement, and a growing willingness to act without direct supervision.

Teacher role modelling provides a second mechanism that clarifies how repeated activities become moral dispositions. Social cognitive theory emphasizes that human learning is shaped by reciprocal interaction among personal factors, behaviour, and the social environment, making the consistent conduct of *ustadz* and *ustadzah* an important source of observational learning (Bandura, 2001). Nevertheless, moral modelling cannot rely on imitation alone. Sanderse (2013) argues that role models are more educationally effective when teachers explicitly explain why a demonstrated quality is morally important and help learners consider how it can be enacted in their own circumstances. This insight extends the present findings: punctuality, patience, respect, honesty, and commitment displayed by Tahfizh educators should be followed by brief reflection, dialogue, and feedback that connect the observed behaviour with Qur'anic values. Such a process changes role modelling from passive exposure into guided moral learning and reduces the possibility that students reproduce routines without understanding their ethical meaning.

The integration of memorization, worship, manners, and social conduct is also consistent with the distinctive orientation of Islamic moral education. Halstead (2007) describes Islamic moral formation as involving knowledge of right conduct, motivation to practise it, and inner transformation through the internalization of Islamic values. He distinguishes interconnected dimensions of *akhlaq*, *adab*, and the qualities of good character. Viewed from this perspective, the Tahfizh program should not assess success solely through the number of verses or juz memorized.

Memorization becomes character education when Qur'anic learning is connected to respectful speech, responsibility for assignments, honesty, patience, care for peers, and consistent worship. This interpretation supports the informant's statement that memorization without purification of the heart and continuous good deeds is insufficient. It also strengthens the proposed model by positioning Qur'anic memorization as the textual and spiritual foundation of a broader process of moral practice rather than as an isolated cognitive achievement.

The findings further suggest that the religious environment operates through relational quality, not merely through the availability of routines and facilities. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) show that educators' social and emotional competence contributes to supportive teacher-student relationships, effective learning management, and positive developmental outcomes. In Rumah Tahfizh, this means that firmness in enforcing schedules should be balanced with patience, emotional sensitivity, fair treatment, and encouragement. A child who experiences correction as respectful guidance is more likely to maintain engagement than one who experiences religious discipline primarily as punishment. Consequently, the proposed model would benefit from including educator development as an explicit supporting component. Training should address mentoring communication, age-appropriate feedback, management of different memorization abilities, and methods for involving parents in reinforcing routines at home. These competencies are particularly important because the preliminary findings indicated variation in teacher backgrounds and institutional practices across Rumah Tahfizh.

These theoretical connections also clarify the limits of the conceptual model. The model demonstrates a plausible process through which habituation, exemplarity, Tahfizh activities, evaluation, and the religious environment interact, but the qualitative evidence does not yet establish that every student moves through the phases in the same order or at the same pace. Differences in age, family support, prior religious experience, learning ability, and duration of participation may influence the internalization process. The model should therefore be applied flexibly, with evaluation covering both memorization progress and observable behavioural indicators across time. Future validation may use longitudinal observations, student and parent reports, and quantitative measures of religious character and autonomous motivation. Such testing would determine whether the proposed phases represent a stable developmental pattern, identify the institutional conditions that strengthen or hinder movement between phases, and assess the model's transferability to other nonformal Islamic education settings.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of religious character development through the Rumah Tahfizh Al-Qur'an program in Musi Rawas is carried out systematically, integratively, and sustainably. In this context, the development process is not limited to formal activities but is internalized in daily social practices through habituation, role modeling, structured activities, and a supportive socio-religious environment.

The main finding of this study is the existence of a gradual pattern of value internalization, namely the phases of being compelled, reluctant compliance, and habituation, which indicates a shift from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic awareness. This pattern emphasizes that character and value formation does not necessarily begin with initial awareness but can evolve through consistent and structured practice. This study is limited to Rumah Tahfizh institutions in Musi Rawas Regency and employs a qualitative approach; therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other educational settings.

Optimize the role of educators, and maintain an inclusive and supportive environment to

ensure the sustainability of character formation. Future research is suggested to test this model in broader contexts and employ quantitative approaches to measure its effectiveness and scalability.

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