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Reconceptualizing Islamic Religious Character Education: A Theoretical Framework for National Character Formation

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Abstract: This study examines Islamic religious character education as a conceptual framework for national character formation through a qualitative, theory-driven library research approach. Drawing on Islamic educational thought and engaging with contemporary character education theories advanced by Lickona, Bandura, and Kohlberg, the study analyzes how moral internalization, pedagogical practices, and spiritual accountability shape ethical behaviour and civic virtue. The findings indicate that Islamic religious character education converges with established character education frameworks in its emphasis on moral cognition, modelling, and habituation, while extending them by integrating spiritual accountability as a sustained source of moral motivation. In pluralistic societies, religious character education, when grounded in inclusivity and moderation, supports national civic virtues such as justice, tolerance, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity. This study contributes to international debates on character education by positioning Islamic religious character education as a theoretically relevant and context-sensitive resource for national character formation. Future studies are encouraged to empirically explore how inclusive models of religious character education are implemented across diverse educational settings and their implications for educational policy and practice.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Character Education; National Character Formation; Moral Internalisation; Civic Virtue; Spiritual Accountability

Introduction

In recent decades, concerns over moral decline, social fragmentation, and weakening civic responsibility have intensified global debates on the role of education in shaping character and citizenship. One of the causes is the rapid pace of globalization, technological development, and cultural transformation, which have significantly influenced value systems, often resulting in increased individualism, moral relativism, and declining social cohesion (Mahfud & Zahriyah, 2025). Character education has emerged as a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in response to moral degradation, social fragmentation, and weakening civic responsibility in many societies. Education is increasingly expected not only to develop cognitive competence but also to cultivate ethical awareness, social

responsibility, and national commitment. In this context, character education is widely regarded as a strategic means of shaping citizens with moral integrity, civic consciousness, and social sensitivity (Arthur et al., 2015; Lickona, 2012).

Among various approaches to character education, religious character education occupies a distinctive position. In many societies, religion remains a powerful moral reference that shapes individual values, social behaviour, and collective identity. In Islamic educational traditions, character formation is not treated as a peripheral outcome but as a core objective of education. Islamic religious character education emphasizes the integration of belief (*'aqīdah*), faith commitment (*imān*), and ethical conduct (*akhlāq*) as inseparable dimensions of moral formation. Islamic education frames ethical behaviour as the internalization of moral values grounded in spiritual accountability and moral consciousness (Al-Attas, 1999; Langgulung, 2004), thereby linking personal morality with social and civic responsibility (Al-Attas, 1999; Langgulung, 2004; Nata, 2016).

Despite the growing body of literature on character and religious education, existing studies tend to approach Islamic character education predominantly in descriptive or normative terms. Many focus on program implementation, the transmission of moral values, or outcomes in religious instruction without sufficiently engaging with broader theoretical debates in character education. Research on character education often adopts secular theoretical frameworks, while studies on Islamic education tend to focus on doctrinal or instructional aspects without explicitly linking religious character formation to national character development (Halstead, 2007; Nucci et al., 2024). As a result, the relationship between Islamic religious character education and contemporary character education theories remains under-theorized, particularly with respect to national character formation and citizenship development.

The contemporary character education theory has been shaped largely by secular psychological and educational frameworks. Prominent among these are Lickona's model of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action; Bandura's social learning theory, emphasizing moral modelling and reinforcement; and Kohlberg's theory of moral development, centred on moral reasoning (Bandura, 1986; Kohlberg, 1981; Lickona, 2012). While these frameworks have contributed significantly to understanding moral development, scholars have noted their limited engagement with spiritual motivation and transcendental dimensions of morality (Arthur et al., 2015; Nucci et al., 2024). This creates an analytical gap when such frameworks are applied to religious educational contexts.

This gap becomes particularly relevant in discussions of national character formation within pluralistic societies. National character requires not only civic knowledge and legal compliance but also deeply internalized values such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and social solidarity (Banks, 2014; UNESCO, 2015). In contexts where religion plays a significant role in moral socialization, excluding religious perspectives from character education discourse risks overlooking an important source of moral motivation and ethical commitment (Arthur et al., 2015; Jackson, 2004). However, religious education is sometimes perceived as potentially conflicting with civic pluralism and national cohesion, especially when its role is not theoretically clarified or when it is framed in exclusionary terms (Gearon, 2013; Modood, 2019).

Against this backdrop, this study argues that Islamic religious character education should not be viewed merely as a contextual or faith-specific practice but as a conceptually relevant framework that can enrich contemporary character education theory and meaningfully contribute to national character formation. By integrating Islamic educational principles with established character education theories, this

study seeks to reposition Islamic religious character education as a source of theoretical insight rather than as a parallel or competing moral system.

Accordingly, this study employs a qualitative library research approach to examine how Islamic religious character education conceptualises moral formation and how its core principles intersect with dominant theories of character education. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. How does Islamic religious character education conceptualize moral and character formation?
2. In what ways does it align with and extend contemporary character education theories?
3. How can Islamic religious character education contribute to national character formation in pluralistic societies?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to international discussions on character education and citizenship by offering a conceptual synthesis integrating religious morality and civic responsibility.

Method

This study employed a qualitative library research design using a conceptual-theoretical inquiry approach. This design was selected because the study aimed to clarify concepts, compare theoretical perspectives, and construct an integrative framework rather than generate empirical generalizations. Library-based research is appropriate for developing conceptual synthesis and theory-oriented analysis in education and social sciences (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019). In this study, scholarly texts were treated as primary data sources and were analyzed to examine how Islamic religious character education contributes to national character formation.

The literature was selected purposively based on its relevance to Islamic education, character education, moral development, civic virtue, and national character formation. The main theoretical sources included Lickona's character education framework, Bandura's social learning theory, and Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Bandura, 1986; Kohlberg, 1981; Lickona, 2012). These sources were used as analytical references to compare Islamic religious character education with contemporary theories of moral and character formation. Additional sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and international policy documents on religious education, citizenship education, pluralism, and moral values in education.

The literature search and selection were conducted through purposive and snowball procedures. Initial searches focused on key terms such as *"Islamic character education," "religious character education," "moral internalization," "spiritual accountability," "moral development theory," "civic virtue,"* and *"national character formation."* Relevant sources were then expanded by examining reference lists and identifying works that contributed substantially to the conceptual synthesis. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Source type	Peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and recognized policy documents	Popular articles, blogs, opinion essays, and non-academic sources
Thematic relevance	Sources related to Islamic education, character education, moral development,	Sources unrelated to moral formation, character

	civic virtue, or national character formation	education, or citizenship values
Conceptual contribution	Sources offering theoretical, conceptual, or analytical insight	Sources that are purely descriptive without relevance to the research questions
Academic credibility	Sources written by recognized scholars or published by reputable journals and publishers	Sources with unclear authorship, weak academic basis, or unverifiable claims

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and theoretical synthesis. Content analysis was used to identify key concepts, recurring themes, and conceptual relationships within the selected literature (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Krippendorff, 2019). The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the study identified core concepts of Islamic religious character education, including moral internalization, ethical habituation, exemplary conduct, moral discipline, and spiritual accountability. Second, these concepts were mapped onto Lickona's model of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action; Bandura's emphasis on modelling and reinforcement; and Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning. Third, the study compared areas of convergence, divergence, and theoretical extension between Islamic religious character education and contemporary character education theories. Fourth, the analysis was synthesized into a conceptual framework explaining the contribution of Islamic religious character education to national character formation.

To strengthen the analytical process, this study used a conceptual comparison matrix. The matrix connected Islamic educational concepts to contemporary character education theories and clarified how Islamic religious character education aligns with, complements, and extends existing theoretical frameworks. The analytical matrix is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Analytical Matrix of Islamic Religious Character Education and Contemporary Character Education Theories

Islamic educational concept	Related contemporary theory	Analytical relation
ʻIlm	Lickona's moral knowing	Moral understanding serves as the basis of ethical judgment
Imān	Lickona's moral feeling	Faith strengthens moral motivation and emotional commitment
ʻAmal	Lickona's moral action	Ethical values are realized through consistent moral practice
Uswah ḥasanah	Bandura's modeling	Character formation occurs through exemplary conduct and observation
Taʻwīd	Bandura's reinforcement and habituation	Moral behavior is strengthened through repeated practice and reinforcement
Spiritual accountability	Extension of Kohlberg's moral reasoning	Moral agency is sustained by transcendental responsibility and ethical intentionality

Analytical rigour was maintained through systematic source selection, repeated reading, conceptual coding, and theoretical triangulation. The use of multiple theoretical perspectives helped reduce single-framework bias and strengthened the credibility of interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Loh, 2015). Islamic educational thought was examined in dialogue with contemporary theories of character education, moral development, and citizenship education. This dialogical approach

enabled the study to clarify both the compatibility and the distinctive contribution of Islamic religious character education within broader character education discourse. As a conceptual library-based study, this research has methodological limitations. It does not examine classroom implementation, teacher practice, or student outcomes through empirical data. Therefore, the findings should be understood as theoretical propositions rather than empirical generalizations. Future studies are encouraged to test and refine this conceptual framework through field-based research, comparative case studies, or mixed-method designs across diverse educational settings.

Results and Discussion

1. Islamic Religious Character Education as Integrated Moral Formation

The analysis of Islamic education literature shows that Islamic religious character education is conceptualized as an integrated process of moral formation rooted in Faith, knowledge, and ethical conduct. In this framework, character is not understood merely as external behaviour or social compliance, but as an internalisedinternalized moral disposition shaped by belief *(ʻaqīdah)*, faith commitment *(imān)*, knowledge *(ʻilm)*, and ethical action *(ʻamal)*. The ultimate orientation of this formation is the realisation of insān kamīl, namely the ideal human being who harmonises Faith, intellect, and moral practice (Nimah et al., 2025). Al-Attas (1999) similarly argues that the purpose of Islamic education is to produce the "good man," whose life is guided by correct knowledge, moral awareness, and responsible action.

This integrated conception distinguishes Islamic religious character education from approaches that treat morality only as behavioural regulation. Islamic education links moral conduct with spiritual consciousness, making ethical behaviour a reflection of inner conviction rather than mere obedience to external rules. Langgulung (2004) and Nata (2016) emphasize that Islamic education aims to cultivate the whole person by integrating intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. Therefore, moral formation in Islamic education is not limited to the transmission of values but also involves their internalization through instruction, habituation, reflection, and exemplary practice.

The core values emphasized in Islamic religious character education include honesty (*ṣidq)*, trustworthiness *(amānah)*, discipline *(intiẓām)*, responsibility *(mas'ūliyyah)*, patience *(ṣabr)*, cooperation *(taʻāwun)*, justice *(ʻadl)*, and social care. These values function not only as religious ideals but also as ethical principles that guide social life. Empirical and conceptual studies in Islamic elementary education indicate that religious character education contributes to students' moral awareness, ethical behavior, and social responsibility (Anggreini et al., 2022; Dharin, 2025; Zubaidah, 2024; Zulfikar et al., 2023). In this context, *ʻAqīdah–Akhlāq* instruction serves as an important medium for connecting belief with daily moral behaviour.

From the perspective of character education theory, this finding aligns with Lickona's model of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Lickona, 2009, 2012). Islamic religious character education also emphasizes moral understanding, emotional commitment, and ethical practice. However, it extends this model by grounding moral motivation in spiritual accountability. This extension addresses the limitation of contemporary character education frameworks, which often focus on social regulation and psychological development without fully addressing transcendental motivation (Arthur et al., 2015). Thus, Islamic religious character

education contributes to a more holistic model of moral formation by integrating cognitive, affective, behavioural, and spiritual dimensions.

2. Pedagogical Mechanisms of Character Internalisation

The findings also reveal that Islamic religious character education operates through several pedagogical mechanisms: exemplary conduct, habituation, advice, discipline, and reward. These mechanisms are central to the process of moral internalization because they translate abstract values into lived educational practices. In Islamic educational thought, teachers, parents, and school leaders are not merely transmitters of knowledge but moral exemplars whose behaviour becomes a living curriculum for students.

The method of exemplary conduct, or *uswah ḥasanah*, occupies a central position in Islamic character education. Putri and Mukhlas (2023), in their comparison of Al-Ghazali and Abdullah Nashih 'Ulwan, show that both scholars regard exemplary conduct as one of the most influential methods in children's moral development. Al-Ghazali emphasizes the immediate moral environment of children, especially the role of parents and teachers, while 'Ulwan places stronger emphasis on the Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate moral model. In contemporary application, Abbas et al. (2024) show that educators are expected to embody values such as honesty, humility, cleanliness, and responsibility in everyday conduct. This confirms that character education depends not only on verbal instruction but also on the consistency between what educators teach and what they practice.

This pedagogical emphasis has a strong theoretical relationship with Bandura's social learning theory. Bandura (1986) explains that individuals learn behaviour through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Islamic character education reflects this principle by positioning teachers and parents as moral models. However, Islamic education gives this process a stronger normative and spiritual foundation. Modelling is not merely a psychological process of imitation but also a religious responsibility through which educators embody ethical ideals in concrete behaviour.

Habituation, or *ta'wīd*, also plays an important role in moral formation. Islamic education assumes that repeated ethical practice gradually shapes moral disposition. Values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and care become stable character traits when practised consistently within school culture and daily life. This mechanism is consistent with Bandura's emphasis on reinforcement, but Islamic education extends it by linking repeated moral action to spiritual awareness and ethical intentionality. Halstead (2007) argues that Islamic values provide a distinctive framework for moral education because ethical practice is tied to religious meaning and accountability.

In addition to modelling and habituation, Islamic pedagogy also uses advice *(naṣīḥāt)*, moral discipline *(ta'dīb)*, and reward and punishment as corrective mechanisms. Putri and Mukhlas (2023) explain that advice should be delivered with wisdom, at the appropriate time, and with emotional sensitivity. Punishment, when used, should not humiliate or harm students; rather, it should function as moral correction. This balanced approach prevents discipline from becoming coercive and instead positions it as a means of guiding the learner toward moral awareness. Therefore, the pedagogical mechanisms of Islamic religious character education integrate instruction, example, practice, correction, and spiritual reflection.

3. Theoretical Convergence with Contemporary Character Education

The analysis indicates that Islamic religious character education converges with major contemporary theories of character and moral development. The first convergence concerns Lickona's framework. Lickona (2009, 2012) conceptualizes character as comprising moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Islamic education similarly integrates knowledge *('ilm)*, faith-based moral commitment *(imān)*, and ethical practice *('amal)*. Moral knowledge provides understanding of right and wrong, Faith strengthens moral commitment, and action demonstrates the realization of values in daily life.

The second convergence appears in relation to Bandura's social learning theory. Islamic education emphasizes *uswah ḥasanah* and *ta'wīd* as mechanisms for shaping moral behaviour. These principles align with Bandura's (1986) view that behaviour is learned through observation, modelling, and reinforcement. However, Islamic education does not reduce modelling and habituation to mere behavioural techniques. Instead, it embeds them within a moral and spiritual framework in which educators carry ethical responsibility, and students are guided toward internal conviction.

The third convergence appears in relation to Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Kohlberg (1981) emphasizes moral reasoning as the basis of ethical judgment. Islamic education also encourages learners to understand ethical consequences and social responsibility. However, Islamic education places moral reasoning within the broader framework of divine guidance, moral intentionality, and spiritual accountability. Gibbs (2013) notes that moral development theories need to address not only reasoning but also moral motivation and emotional commitment. In this regard, Islamic religious character education complements cognitive moral theory by integrating reason, emotion, action, and spiritual responsibility.

The relationship between Islamic religious character education and contemporary character education theory can be summarised as follows.

Table 3. Conceptual Findings on Islamic Religious Character Education and Character Theory

Main finding	Related theoretical basis	Conceptual contribution
Islamic character education integrates faith, knowledge, and action	Al-Attas; Langgulung; Nata; Nimah et al.	Provides a holistic model of moral formation
Moral values are internalized through instruction, practice, and reflection	Lickona; Anggreini et al.; Dharin; Zubaidah; Zulfikar et al.	Connects moral cognition, feeling, and action
Exemplary conduct and habituation shape moral behavior	Bandura; Putri & Mukhlas; Abbas et al.	Explains the pedagogical mechanism of character formation
Spiritual accountability extends moral reasoning	Kohlberg; Gibbs; Nucci et al.	Adds transcendental motivation to moral agency
Islamic moral values support civic virtue	Banks; UNESCO; Al-Qaradhawi; Wahib & Nafi'ah; Zulfikar et al.	Links religious morality with national character formation

This synthesis demonstrates that Islamic religious character education is not separate from contemporary character education discourse. Rather, it can be

positioned as a theoretically relevant framework that aligns with and extends existing. Its distinctive contribution lies in integrating spiritual accountability as a sustained source of moral motivation.

4. Spiritual Accountability as a Theoretical Extension

One of the main theoretical contributions of this study is the identification of spiritual accountability as an extension of contemporary character education theory. While Lickona, Bandura, and Kohlberg provide important explanations of moral cognition, moral behaviour, modelling, reinforcement, and reasoning, these theories have paid limited attention to transcendental motivation. Islamic religious character education addresses this limitation by framing ethical behaviour as a matter of responsibility before God, society, and the self.

Spiritual accountability means that moral action is guided not only by social expectations, legal norms, or rational judgment, but also by awareness of divine responsibility and long-term ethical consequences. This concept strengthens moral agency by encouraging individuals to act ethically even in the absence of external supervision. In this sense, Islamic religious character education provides an internal source of moral regulation. Al-Qaradhawi (2007) emphasizes that Islamic moral consciousness should avoid extremism and be grounded in balance, justice, and responsibility. This view supports the idea that spiritual accountability should strengthen ethical conduct rather than produce rigid or exclusionary behaviour.

This theoretical extension is important because contemporary moral development theories have been criticized for insufficiently addressing emotional and motivational aspects of morality. Nucci et al. (2024) argue that character education needs to consider broader dimensions of moral development, including motivation, identity, and social context. Islamic religious character education contributes to this discussion by integrating rational moral judgment with spiritual motivation. Moral action is therefore not only a result of cognitive reasoning but also of faith-based commitment and ethical intentionality.

Spiritual accountability also strengthens the relationship between personal morality and social responsibility. When students internalize values such as honesty, justice, responsibility, and care as both religious obligations and social duties, character education becomes more than individual moral training. It becomes a found, critical, ethical participation in society. This shows that Islamic religious character education can contribute to contemporary character education by offering a morally grounded, spiritually motivated, and socially relevant model of character formation.

5. From Religious Character to National Civic Virtue

The findings further show that Islamic religious character education contributes to national character formation by cultivating civic virtues. National character is not limited to legal obedience or national identity; it also includes shared values that support social cohesion, justice, tolerance, responsibility, and respect for human rights. Banks (2014) argues that citizenship education in pluralistic societies requires respect for diversity and inclusive civic participation. UNESCO (2015) similarly emphasizes that education should promote human dignity, social responsibility, and the common good.

Islamic religious character education supports these civic goals when it is grounded in moderation, justice, and inclusivity. Values such as tolerance, cooperation, social care, honesty, and responsibility are embedded in Islamic moral teachings and can function as civic virtues in national life. Nata (2016) explains that Islamic education links personal morality with social responsibility, while Al-Qaradhawi (2007) stresses the importance of balance and moderation in religious understanding. These principles are relevant to national character formation because they prevent religious morality from becoming narrow or exclusionary.

Studies on Islamic schooling also show that religious character education can strengthen students' discipline and emphasise rules, cooperation, and love for the homeland. Wahib and Nafi'ah (2022) highlight the importance of Islamic religious education in shaping national character, while Zulfikar et al. (2023) demonstrate that Islamic elementary schools can strengthen national character through moral values and school culture. These findings indicate that Islamic religious character education can support national cohesion when implemented as inclusive moral education rather than as sectarian instruction.

In pluralistic societies, the relationship between religious education and civic virtue requires careful theoretical clarification. Religious education is sometimes viewed as a potential source of exclusivism, especially when it is taught rigidly or without dialogical engagement. However, scholars such as Jackson (2004), Esposito (2011), Modood (2019), and Iliško (2022) suggest that religion can function as a constructive resource for citizenship, peacebuilding, and social harmony when it is interpreted inclusively and pedagogically articulated. Therefore, Islamic religious character education can contribute to national character formation by promoting respect for diversity, civic responsibility, and shared ethical values.

This finding challenges the assumption that religious character education necessarily conflicts with pluralism. Instead, the contribution of religious character education depends on how it is framed, taught, and practised. When Islamic character education emphasizes moderation *(wasaṭiyyah)*, justice, compassion, and human dignity, it supports national civic virtue. However, when it is taught in an exclusive or coercive manner, it may weaken civic openness. This critical boundary is essential for ensuring that Islamic religious character education strengthens, rather than undermines, national character formation.

6. Conceptual Framework of Islamic Religious Character Education for National Character Formation

Based on the synthesis above, Islamic religious character education can be conceptualized as a pathway from religious moral foundations to national civic virtue. The process begins with the integration of *'aqīdah, imān, 'ilm,* and *akhlāq* as the foundation of moral consciousness. These foundations are internalised through pedagogical mechanisms such as *uswah ḥasanah, ta'wīd, naṣīḥāt*, and the emphasis on reward. Through these mechanisms, students develop moral understanding, moral motivation, ethical habituation, and spiritual accountability.

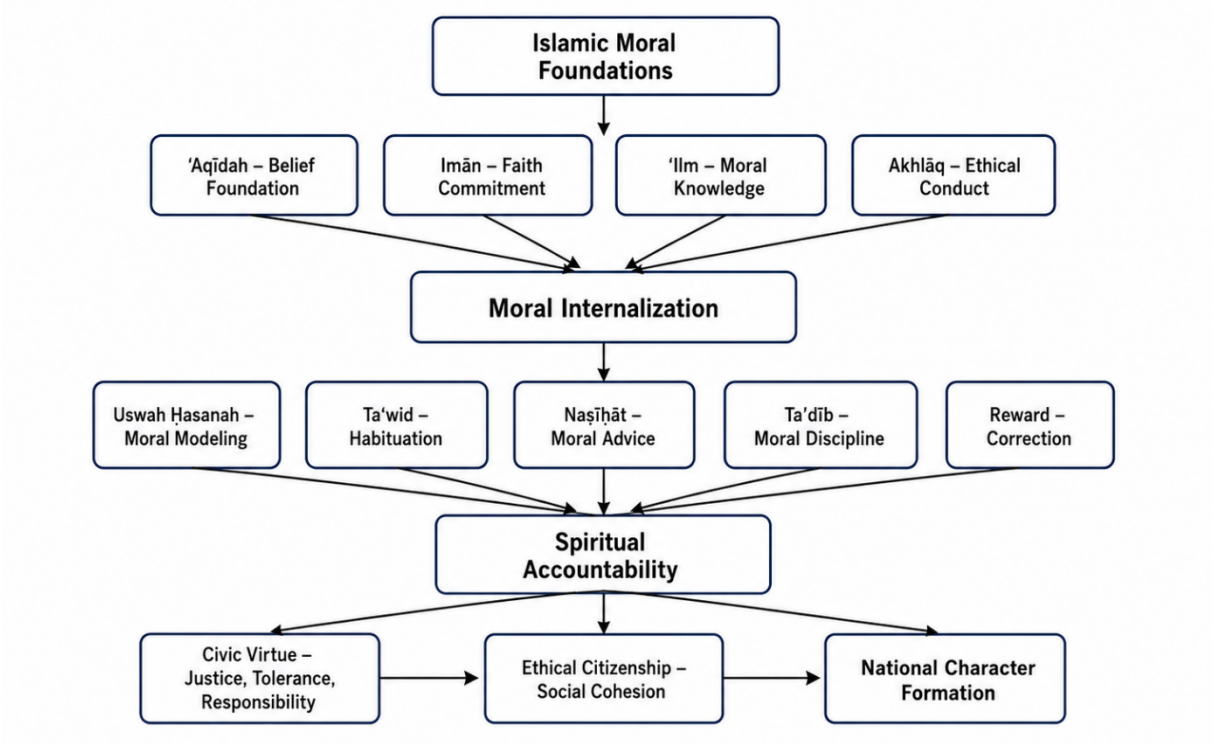


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Islamic Religius Character Education for National Charactrer Formation

Spiritual accountability functions as the central theoretical extension in this framework. It connects moral reasoning with transcendental responsibility and strengthens the learner's commitment to ethical action. When this moral agency is directed toward social life, it produces concepts such as justice, tolerance, social responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and respect for human dignity. These civic virtues, in turn, contribute to the formation of national character by strengthening social cohesion, internalized citizenship, and collective responsibility.

Thus, Islamic religious character education should not be understood merely as religious instruction or doctrinal transmission. It is a broader educational framework that integrates moral cognition, affective commitment, behavioural practice, spiritual motivation, and civic responsibility. Its contribution to national character formation lies in its ability to transform religious values into inclusive civic virtues. This transformation is most effective when Islamic education is implemented through moderation, dialogical engagement, and respect for diversity.

7. Theoretical Boundaries and Critical Reflections

Although Islamic religious character education makes a strong conceptual contribution, its role in national character formation must be critically examined. The theoretical strength of this framework lies in its ability to integrate moral internalization, pedagogical practice, spiritual accountability, and civic virtue. However, this potential can only be realized when religious character education is taught inclusively and reflectively.

The main boundary concerns the risk of rigid or exclusionary interpretation. If religious character education is reduced to doctrinal obedience without critical reflection, it may fail to cultivate civic openness. If it emphasises group identity

without respect for diversity, it may weaken social cohesion. Therefore, the contribution of Islamic religious character education to national character formation depends on its pedagogical orientation. It must be grounded in moderation, justice, human dignity, and dialogical engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to character education scholarship by positioning Islamic religious internalisation as both compatible with and contributive to contemporary character education theory. It aligns with the realized model of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action; resonates with Bandura's theory of modelling and reinforcement; and extends Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning through the concept of spiritual accountability. At the same time, it contributes to citizenship education by showing how reliability can be transformed into civic virtue in pluralistic societies.

Therefore, Islamic religious character education provides a systematic pathway from individual moral formation to national character strengthening. It cultivates personal morality through faith-based values, reinforces ethical behaviour through modelling and habituation, and extends moral responsibility to social and civic domains. When implemented inclusively, it can serve as a moral resource for national cohesion, ethical citizenship, and social responsibility.

Conclusion

This study has examined Islamic religious character education as a conceptual framework for national character formation through a qualitative library-based analysis. By integrating Islamic educational thought with contemporary character education theories, the study demonstrates that religious character education meaningfully contributes to moral internalization, civic virtue, and ethical commitment.

The findings indicate that Islamic religious character education converges with established character education theories in its emphasis on moral cognition, moral modelling, and ethical habituation, while also extending these frameworks by incorporating spiritual accountability as a source of moral motivation. This extension addresses a notable limitation in secular moral theories, which often under-theorize the motivational and transcendental dimensions of ethical behaviour.

Importantly, this study shows that religious character education, when grounded in principles of moderation, inclusivity, and dialogical engagement, supports national civic virtue in pluralistic societies. Values such as justice, tolerance, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity function not only as internalising religious ideals but also as civic virtues essential for national cohesion. At the same time, this study acknowledges the theoretical boundaries of religious character education, particularly the risks associated with rigid or exclusionary applications in diverse educational contexts.

By offering a conceptual synthesis that bridges religious morality and civic responsibility, this study contributes to international debates on character education and under-theorized citizenship. Future research is encouraged to empirically examine how inclusive models of religious character education are implemented across diverse cultural and institutional settings, and to explore their implications for educational policy and practice in multicultural societies.

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