

Implementation of Core Ethical Values by Peers in Shaping the Islamic Character of Elementary School Students

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Abstract

The formation of students' Islamic character at the elementary school level faces various challenges, particularly in strengthening the values of honesty, responsibility, and caring in daily life, while character education in schools still tends to rely on the role of teachers, so that the potential of peers as social agents has not been optimally utilized. This study aims to describe the implementation of core ethical values by peers in shaping students' Islamic character and to analyze its implications at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research informants consisted of the principal, an Islamic Religious Education teacher, a fifth-grade classroom teacher, six students, and three parents. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that the implementation of core ethical values, namely honesty, responsibility, and caring, is carried out through six interrelated strategies: role modeling, habituation, mutual advice and reminders, cooperation, social reinforcement, and peer social control. The implementation of these values has implications for strengthening students' Islamic character, reflected in the development of honest, responsible, and caring behavior, as well as the emergence of positive social dynamics in the form of peer support circles, constructive peer pressure, and positive friendship patterns. This study confirms that positive social relationships within peer groups contribute to the sustainability of character value implementation on an ongoing basis in the elementary school environment.

Keywords

Core Ethical Values; Peers; Islamic Character; Character Education; Elementary School



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INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century faces increasingly complex challenges along with the rapid development of science, technology, and globalization. The ease of access to

information through the internet and social media allows learners to acquire a wide range of knowledge without the limitations of space and time, but such progress is not always followed by the ability to filter information and use it wisely. The increase in individualistic behavior, low social concern, declining attitude of responsibility, and various forms of dishonesty are challenges that must be faced by the world of education. Various cases of bullying, abuse of digital media, violations of school rules, and low academic integrity show that character education is still a problem that requires serious attention so that education is not enough to only emphasize the cognitive aspect, but must also be able to form students who have moral integrity, social responsibility, and noble morals.

The issue of character is an important issue because good character is the foundation for individual success, both in personal and social life. A person who has high intellectual intelligence but is not balanced by good character has the potential to abuse his or her abilities, while individuals with strong character tend to be able to manage themselves, establish healthy social relationships, and make a positive contribution to society. Character education is thus not only interpreted as the transfer of knowledge about good values, but also as a process of habituating and internalizing values so that they become part of the personality of students, and schools have a great responsibility to create an environment that fosters these values.

From an Islamic perspective, the formation of morals is the main goal of education. Allah SWT. said in QS. Al-'Ashr [103]: 1-3 which affirms that people are at a loss except those who believe, do righteous deeds, and counsel each other in truth and patience. The verse shows that human success is not only determined by individual qualities, but also by social processes in the form of reminding each other in truth. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also said, "Indeed, I was sent only to perfect the glory of morality" (HR. Ahmad in *Musnad Ahmad*, No. 8952), which affirms that the formation of morals is the core of the apostolic mission of the Prophet Muhammad (saw). In line with this, Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that education aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who have faith and piety, noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible, so that character formation becomes an integral part of the implementation of education in each educational unit.

One of the approaches that can be used in character formation is the strengthening of *core ethical values*, which are the core ethical values that are the basis for the formation of a person's character (Lickona, 2012). This research focuses *core ethical values* on three main values, namely honesty (*honesty/ash-shidq*), responsibility (*responsibility / mas'uliyah*), and

care (*caring/ta'awun wa rahmah*). Honesty is related to the conformity between words, deeds, and reality so as to give birth to a person who can be trusted; responsibility related to awareness of carrying out duties and obligations and courage to accept consequences; While caring is the ability to show empathy, attention, and positive actions towards others and the surrounding environment. These three values are universal values that are in line with Islamic teachings and are an important foundation in the formation of students' Islamic character, especially at elementary school age when children are in the phase of moral and social development that greatly determines the formation of their personality in the future.

Based on the results of initial observations at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara, it is still found that students have not shown consistent honest behavior, lack of responsibility for duties and obligations, and low concern for friends and the surrounding environment, such as not doing assignments on time, not accustomed to admitting mistakes, lack of discipline in carrying out class pickets, and lack of empathy for friends who are experiencing difficulties. This condition shows that the internalization of the values of honesty, responsibility, and care has not been fully realized in the daily lives of students, and if not overcome immediately, it can have an impact on the low quality of social relationships and the weakening of students' Islamic character.

One of the environments that has a great influence on the formation of students' character is peer groups. At elementary school age, students spend most of their time with their friends, both in learning activities and outside of learning, so that peers play a role as one of the social agents in the process of individual socialization (Mead, 1934; Bandura, 2013). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, "A person is above the religion (behavior and habits) of his close friends, so one of you should pay attention to who is made a close friend" (HR. Abu Dawud, No. 4833; al-Tirmidhi, No. 2378), which shows that peers have a significant influence on the formation of individual behavior and character so that they can be positioned as strategic social agents in implementing the values of honesty, responsibility, and concern for students.

Various previous studies have shown that character education is influenced by the family, school, and peer environment. Ningsih, Pratiwi, and Hariastuti (2025) found that peers play a role as facilitators in shaping the character of students at school. Wardani and Suriani (2024) concluded that peer interaction contributes to the formation of the character of elementary school students, while Pratiwi, Sugiatno, and Carolina (2021) found that peers play a role in the formation of students' morals. Nurmela, Asyari, Hasanah, and Arifin (2024) and Solihin, Hasanah, and Fajrussalam (2020) explained that *core ethical values* sourced from Islamic teachings have an important role in shaping students' character. However, these

studies have not specifically examined the implementation of *core ethical values* that are limited to the values of honesty, responsibility, and care through the role of peers as social agents in shaping the Islamic character of elementary school students. So far, character formation in schools is often seen as the exclusive domain of teachers, even though the reality in the field shows that the peer environment has an equally strong influence, both in providing negative pressure and positive encouragement for children's behavior.

Based on this description, this study aims to: (1) describe and analyze the implementation of *core ethical values* in the form of honesty, responsibility, and care carried out by peers in shaping the Islamic character of students at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara; and (2) describe and analyze the implications of the implementation of *core ethical values* by peers towards the formation of Islamic character of students at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara. The novelty of this research lies in the placement of peers as the main actor—not just a social context—in the process of internalizing core Islamic ethical values, as well as revealing the social dynamics that accompany the process as conceptual findings that enrich the study of character education based on students' social relations.

Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the scientific treasures of character education, Islamic education, and educational sociology, especially in expanding the conceptual understanding of the process of implementing values through social interaction between students which has been studied more from the perspective of the role of teachers and families. Practically, the results of this research are expected to be a consideration for school principals and teachers in formulating character development policies and strategies that involve the active role of peers as social agents, become a reference for parents in understanding the importance of children's friendship environment, and become an empirical basis for future researchers who want to develop a study on the internalization of character values based on students' social relations at the level and context different education.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the *case study* method, which was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand social phenomena related to the strategy of internalizing *core ethical values* by peers in shaping the Islamic character of students, without the intention of testing causal relationships or measuring the influence between variables (Moleong, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2025). This study uses a naturalistic and interpretive qualitative approach with an interpretive-constructivist paradigm that views social reality as the result of construction built through the experience, interaction, and meaning of informants to their social environment.

The research was carried out at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara, Bontang City, East Kalimantan, which was chosen because it has a school culture that supports character strengthening through various habituation programs and religious activities, heterogeneous social conditions of students in terms of economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and a wide space of interaction between students. The research was focused on class V students consisting of two study groups (V-A and V-B) with the consideration that at this level students began to build stronger friend groups and showed significant peer influence. The research informants were determined purposively, consisting of school principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, class V teachers, six class V students, and three parents of students. The research was carried out for six months (January-June 2026), with the main data collection carried out in March-May 2026.

Data was collected through three techniques, namely moderate participatory observation of the social situation in classes V-A and V-B, in-depth semi-structured interviews with all informants, and documentation of self-development programs, school discipline, class agreements, picket schedules, and photos of activities. The three techniques are used in an integrated and complementary manner to obtain in-depth and comprehensive data on the strategy of internalizing *core ethical values* and their implications for the formation of students' Islamic character.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which included three stages. Data *condensation* is carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data according to the focus of the research. Data presentation (*data display*) is carried out by compiling data in the form of narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic descriptions that describe value internalization strategies. Conclusion *drawing and verification* is carried out through data interpretation to find meanings, patterns, and themes that are continuously verified through advanced data collection and triangulation. The validity of the data is tested through triangulation of sources, triangulation techniques, and confirmation (*member check*) to informants so that credible findings are obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Core Ethical Values by Peers in Shaping the Islamic Character of Students

The results of the study show that the implementation of *core ethical values* by peers does not take place formally through the instruction of teachers or the school, but develops naturally through various forms of social interaction in students' friend groups. Peers not only play the role of recipients of character values, but also become social agents who influence each other in instilling, strengthening, and developing positive behaviors in daily

life in the school environment. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, six interrelated implementation strategies were identified, namely example, habituation, advice and mutual reminder, cooperation, social strengthening, and peer social control. Exemplary development occurs when students who consistently show honest, responsible, and caring behavior become behavioral references for their peers. The Class V teacher explained that students who show a positive attitude indirectly become role models followed by their peers, especially in the implementation of tasks and obligations in the classroom. The imitation process takes place naturally through daily observation, without the need for explicit instruction from the teacher, so that the good behavior of a student can be transmitted to other students through the observational learning mechanism (Bandura, 2013).

Habituation is an important strategy that develops through the consistent repetition of positive behaviors in various school activities. One of the students expressed his experience in imitating the habit of maintaining cleanliness shown by his friend:

"Once, I saw a diligent friend immediately throw his food wrappers into the outside trash can, so I set an example so that the cleanliness of our adiwiyata school is maintained" (PD5A-3, April 10, 2026).

The statement shows that positive behavior carried out repeatedly by a student is able to form new habits for his friends through the process of observation and example. Parents of students also corroborated this finding by saying that clean living habits formed at school are carried over to the home environment, which shows that consistent habituation through peer interaction has durability across contexts.

This strategy is manifested through the habit of students advising each other and reminding each other to continue to behave according to the values of honesty, responsibility, and care. One of the students stated, "Advising him that dishonest activities if carried out continuously will become a habit" (PD5A-1, April 10, 2026). This strategy is not interpreted as a judgmental reprimand, but as a form of students' concern for the development of the character of their peers, so that it becomes a form of implementation of *core ethical values* that contribute to the formation of students' Islamic character. Cooperation is seen in various joint activities, such as the implementation of class pickets, school environmental community service, completion of group assignments, and assistance to friends who are experiencing difficulties. One student expressed his pride when he was able to help his friend:

"I feel proud when I can help a friend who doesn't have enough money to buy food, so I buy it" (PD5B-3, April 10, 2026).

These findings show that cooperation is not only oriented towards completing tasks, but also a means to help and strengthen each other between students, so that friendships become a learning medium that allows students to practice the values of honesty, responsibility, and care directly. Social strengthening is manifested through support, appreciation, and positive encouragement between students to maintain good behavior. When a student faced an unpleasant response for reminding his friend to throw garbage, he obtained emotional reinforcement from his close friends: "... My close friends immediately encouraged me, they said, 'It's okay, just ignore it, what you did was right'" (PD5B-3, April 10, 2026). This kind of support plays an important role in helping students to consistently do good despite facing social challenges in their circle of friends.

Social control is manifested through the courage of students to remind, direct, and invite their friends to continue to behave according to the character values that develop at school, not as a form of punishment but as a form of concern for maintaining a positive friendship environment. Nevertheless, social control does not always go unimpeded; Some students are worried about reminding their friends for fear of being shunned by their friend group, as one student revealed: "I actually really want to tell a story or report to my teacher that the class is sometimes chaotic, but I'm afraid that later my friends will stay away from me and call me a complainer" (PD5B-1, April 10, 2026). These findings suggest that the process of social control in peer groups has a complex dynamic between the desire to maintain a positive social environment and the accompanying social pressures.

The six strategies are not a form of implementation that stands alone, but a construction that is interrelated and strengthening. Example opens up space for habituation, habituation develops into a culture of mutual reminding, and these relationships are strengthened through cooperation, social strengthening, and peer social control, so that the implementation of *core ethical values* takes place as a sustainable social process, not just an individual value intake. The findings were strengthened by a triangulation of sources from school principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, grade V teachers, and parents of students. The Principal explained that the habituation of character values is carried out in an integrated manner in various school programs, including the Adiwiyata program which fosters environmental awareness, so that students get a sustainable learning experience. The Islamic Religious Education teacher added that strengthening honest character is not only carried out through learning materials, but also through habituation and example that are carried out consistently. Parents of students also confirmed that positive habits formed through peer interaction at school, such as discipline in maintaining cleanliness and personal responsibility, were carried over to the family environment. The consistency of findings from various data sources strengthens the credibility of the conclusion that peers function as real

social agents in the implementation of *core ethical values* at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara.

Implications of the Implementation of Core Ethical Values on the Formation of Islamic Character of Students

The implementation of *core ethical values* by peers has significant implications, both in strengthening individual character and in the formation of social dynamics of student friend groups at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara. The strengthening of honest character is seen through the habit of not cheating, returning items that are not right, and the courage to admit mistakes, as expressed by students: "If you are honest, you want to say the truth, and admit a mistake made" (PD5A-2, April 10, 2026). Strengthening the character of responsibility is seen through the awareness of carrying out the task without having to be reminded and the willingness to accept the consequences of actions, while the strengthening of the caring character is seen through the willingness to help friends who are in difficulty and maintain the cleanliness of the environment. These three characters develop not only through formal learning, but also through social relationships built in students' friend groups.

The implementation of *core ethical values* has implications for the formation of social relationships that provide mutual support in students' friend groups, both in the form of task completion assistance and emotional strengthening to maintain positive behavior. This pattern of social relations in this study is identified as *peer support circle*, which is a social relationship between peers which is characterized by providing mutual support, motivation, and strengthening of positive behavior in an effort to maintain the implementation of *core ethical values* and strengthen the Islamic character of students.

Social dynamics in friendship groups are also characterized by the emergence of constructive *peer pressure*. Students who consistently implement character values sometimes face unpleasant social responses, as expressed by one student: "I was once told to be 'pretentious' with my friends because I often remember to throw garbage in its place" (PD5B-3, April 10, 2026). Interestingly, such social pressure does not necessarily weaken students' commitment; On the contrary, the support of close friends actually strengthens their courage to maintain behavior that is believed to be right. Social pressure with such a character is identified in this study as *constructive peer pressure*, which is a form of social pressure that indirectly contributes to strengthening students' commitment to maintaining the implementation of character values.

Social support and constructive social pressure that develop simultaneously contribute to the formation of a positive pattern of friendship relationships, which is characterized by the tendency of students to influence each other well, invite friends to do good, and

strengthen each other's implementation of the values of honesty, responsibility, and care. This relationship pattern shows that positive social relationships in the friendship group contribute to the sustainability of the implementation of character values that support the formation of students' Islamic character in a sustainable manner in the school environment.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the formation of students' Islamic character does not only take place through formal learning in the classroom, but also develops through intensive social interaction in friend groups. The intensity of interaction between students makes friendship as one of the educational spaces that contributes to the formation of Islamic character. These findings reinforce Bandura's (2013) social learning theory which explains that behavior is learned through observation, emulation, and social reinforcement, and is in line with Mead's (1934) perspective of symbolic interactionism which places social interaction as a space for self-formation and values.

The peculiarity of the findings of this study lies in the nature of the six implementation strategies—example, habituation, advice and mutual reminding, cooperation, social reinforcement, and peer social control—which do not stand alone, but form a construction of value implementation that strengthens each other in a sustainable manner. In the perspective of Islamic education, this characteristic is in line with the command of Allah SWT. in QS. Ali 'Imran [3]: 104 to call for virtue, to enjoin the makruf, and to prevent from the disobedient, as well as QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]: 2 which commands Muslims to help each other in virtue and piety. The examples found in this study are also relevant to QS. Al-Ahzab [33]: 21 which places the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) as an exemplary wife, as well as a hadith that analogizes good friends and bad friends such as perfumers and blacksmiths (HR. Bukhari and Muslim), which affirms the great influence of the friendship environment on the formation of one's character.

These findings are also relevant to the concept of the *zone of proximal development* put forward by Vygotsky (1978), who explains that a person's development can be optimized through help and interaction with others who have more abilities, including more morally mature peers. In the context of this study, students who have internalized the values of honesty, responsibility, and care consistently function as "companions" for their friends in the process of internalizing values, so that the friendship group becomes a social learning space that allows students to gradually raise each other's standards of behavior.

Compared to the research of Ningsih, Pratiwi, and Hariastuti (2025) which places peers as character facilitators in general, and the research of Wardani and Suriani (2024) and Pratiwi, Sugiatno, and Carolina (2021) which emphasizes the contribution of peer interaction

to character and morals in general, this study provides novelty by detailing six concrete value implementation strategies and identifying the three forms of social dynamics that accompany them, namely *peer support circle*, *constructive peer pressure*, and positive friendship relationship patterns. The findings on *constructive peer pressure* also expand the conceptual understanding of *peer pressure* which has been widely understood as a negative phenomenon, by showing that social pressure from friend groups can function as a reinforcement of moral commitment if it takes place in an ecosystem of friendships that collectively uphold the value of goodness. These findings also strengthen the studies of Nurmela, Asyari, Hasanah, and Arifin (2024) and Solihin, Hasanah, and Fajrussalam (2020) regarding the relevance of *core ethical values* based on Islamic teachings by showing how these values are empirically implemented through the social relations of elementary school students, not just through formal learning.

The implications of this study confirm that strengthening character education in elementary schools is not enough to instill individual values through teachers, but also needs to be directed at strengthening the social ecosystem of students' friendships. Schools and teachers need to deliberately optimize the role of peers as partners in character building, for example through collaborative habituation programs, strengthening the culture of reminding each other, and creating a space for social appreciation that encourages the sustainability of the implementation of the values of honesty, responsibility, and care in daily life in the school environment.

This research has limitations that need to be stated. As a case study, this finding describes a phenomenon that takes place contextually in SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara so that it is not intended to be generalized to all elementary schools with different social and cultural characteristics. The number of student informants limited to six people in class V also opens up opportunities for further research to expand the scope of the subject, examine differences in dynamics between grade levels, or use a mixed-methods approach to confirm the patterns of *peer support circles* and *constructive peer pressure* found in this study in a wider population.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, two things can be concluded. First, the implementation of *core ethical values* by peers in shaping the Islamic character of students at SD Negeri 009 Bontang Utara takes place through mutually reinforcing social relationships in friend groups, which are manifested through six interrelated strategies, namely example, habituation, advice and mutual reminding, cooperation, social strengthening, and peer social control. The six strategies are not a form of implementation that stands alone, but a

construction of sustainable and mutually reinforcing value implementation in the process of forming students' Islamic character.

Second, the implementation of *core ethical values* by peers has implications for strengthening the Islamic character of students which is shown through the development of honest, responsible, and caring behavior, as well as the formation of positive social dynamics in the form of *peer support circles*, *constructive peer pressure*, and positive friendship patterns. These social dynamics show that positive social relationships in the friendship group contribute to the sustainability of the implementation of character values that support the formation of students' Islamic character in a sustainable manner in the school environment.

Schools and teachers are advised to develop the strengthening of character education that is not only oriented to learning in the classroom, but also provides space for the development of positive social relationships in students' friendship groups, including through collaborative habituation programs and strengthening the culture of reminding each other between students. The next research is suggested to develop a study on the implementation of *core ethical values* through peer relations at different educational levels and contexts with broader research approaches and subjects.

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