Unlocking Spiritual Growth: Embracing Simplicity Values in Islamic Religious Education and Moral Character Development

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Abstract

This study delves into the integration of simplicity values within Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in Palopo City, highlighting the crucial role these values play in shaping individuals capable of confronting contemporary society's moral and material challenges. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research evaluates educational content for its alignment with simplicity principles and gauges student comprehension and application of these values. Results indicate a strong correlation between the teachings of Islamic religious education and the cultivation of a simple, ethical lifestyle, emphasizing virtues such as honesty, humility, and social responsibility. Most students exhibit a sound understanding of simplicity, pointing to the effectiveness of current pedagogical methods. Nonetheless, the study identifies a need for enhanced teaching strategies to engage a subset of students showing lesser comprehension. The findings advocate for a concerted effort among educators, parents, and the broader community to embed simplicity deeply in educational practices. The study suggests that it is pivotal for individual character development and fostering a just, sustainable, and harmonious society. It underscores the importance of continuous educational refinement and community involvement in nurturing a generation that values simplicity and ethical living, thereby contributing to the global fight against materialism and corruption.

Keywords: Simplicity Values, Islamic Religious Education, Moral Character

1. INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly complex and challenging modern global society, the urgency of Islamic religious education has undergone significant evolution (Asefi et al., 2019; Solihin et al., 2020). No longer merely focusing on a theoretical understanding of religious doctrines, Islamic religious education now emphasizes the practical application of Islamic values in daily life (Yumnah, 2021). It is highly relevant, especially in character formation and individual spiritual development. Faced with an era marked by the dominance of materialism, consumerism, and various moral crises, today's global society is confronted with the urgent need to internalize and apply the values of simplicity taught by Islam (Dian et al., 2023; Solihin et al., 2020). These

values serve as guidelines for a healthy life and a solid foundation for educating character and building and strengthening the spiritual resilience of learners.

Applying the values of simplicity in Islamic religious education has the potential to respond to various contemporary issues facing humanity. In an era of rapid globalization, where information and cultures migrate and blend without boundaries, forming a strong spiritual identity and moral character becomes increasingly vital (Dian et al., 2023; Muhsan & Abdul Haris, 2022). The values of simplicity taught by Islam, which include honesty, humility, resilience, and justice, can serve as a foundation for individuals to choose an ethical, socially and environmentally responsible lifestyle (Arifinsyah et al., 2020; Muna et al., 2022; Mundilestari, 2022). Thus, Islamic religious education enriched with simplicity is essential for individual spiritual growth and for creating a more just, sustainable, and harmonious society on the global stage.

The values of simplicity in Islamic religious education play a significant role in addressing various global issues, ranging from reducing socio-economic disparities and shaping better character and personality to supporting sustainable management of natural resources (Susanto et al., 2023; Taufik, 2020). Simplicity encourages a healthier lifestyle mentally and physically, reduces stress, and emphasizes the importance of spiritual satisfaction over materialism (Kopetz, 2019). Furthermore, this value strengthens social solidarity by teaching the importance of sharing and caring for others (Osikominu & Bocken, 2020; Rebouças & Soares, 2021). By integrating the values of simplicity into the curriculum and educational practices, we can help shape a more harmonious, tolerant, and sustainable global society (Peifer et al., 2020; Saefullah & Zahra, 2024).

Simplicity, as one of the core values in Islamic teachings, offers a different perspective on life, an approach that emphasizes the importance of heart satisfaction, peace of mind, and essence-oriented living, rather than materialism (Asefi et al., 2019; Ihwani et al., 2023). When integrated into Islamic religious education, this value has significant potential in shaping individuals who have a strong understanding of religion and possess robust moral character and high spiritual adaptability in facing various contemporary challenges (Naveh & Shelef, 2021; Supriyanto et al., 2022).

The population of Palopo City represents a microcosm of Indonesia's cultural and religious pluralism. The dominance of Islam adherents is recorded as the highest, followed by minority groups practicing Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Kong Hu Cu. Despite enriching the social tapestry, this diversity often poses significant challenges in the social context. Specifically, Palopo has garnered media attention and oversight scrutiny due to a series of detrimental corruption cases, including maladministration in the procurement of medical equipment at Sawerigading Regional Hospital and the involvement of twenty-five members of the Palopo City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in corrupt practices (Chalik Mawardi, 2022; M Darwin Fatir, 2022). Effectively addressing these cases is crucial to prevent potential conflicts and wider social fractures within the community.

In promoting simplicity values, holistic problem-solving is essential, teaching valuable lessons on greed's risks (Wahab Syakhrani, 2020). Palopo City must reinforce simplicity and integrity practices to enhance social foundations, fostering sustainable

development (Kaso et al., 2021). Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 emphasizes character education's role in schools, communities, and families, instilling anti-corruption and anti-radicalism values. Islamic and Moral Education cultivates students' character, aligning with Pancasila principles and fostering global competence. Islamic values of simplicity nurture character and spiritual resilience, emphasizing honesty, tolerance, and social responsibility. Integration into education combats radicalism and corruption, fostering adaptability and tolerance in diverse societies (Hidayat, 2019; Putra & Santosa, 2024). Teachers' positive role modelling and parental involvement are crucial in creating a supportive school culture for character development. Synergy among stakeholders ensures consistent character-building, fostering responsible citizens aligned with Islamic and Pancasila values (Firman et al., 2021; Indriyani, 2023; Junaidah et al., 2022). Studying primary education students in Palopo City provides insight into anti-radicalism and anti-corruption understanding. Strengthening simplicity supports Palopo City's vision for advancement and sustainability by 2023.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research aims to examine the reinforcement of the value of simplicity through the Islamic religious education curriculum and moral education in the context of primary education units in Palopo. The study is designed to explore the forms and outcomes of implementing Islamic religious education and moral education to reinforce the value of simplicity among students at the primary education level. As part of the theoretical framework, this research proposes a conceptual model outlining the logical flow of thinking and main discussion structure. The model aims to provide a systematic view of how Islamic religious education and moral education can be integrated into education to strengthen the value of simplicity among students and identify success indicators that can be used to assess the effectiveness of this educational approach.
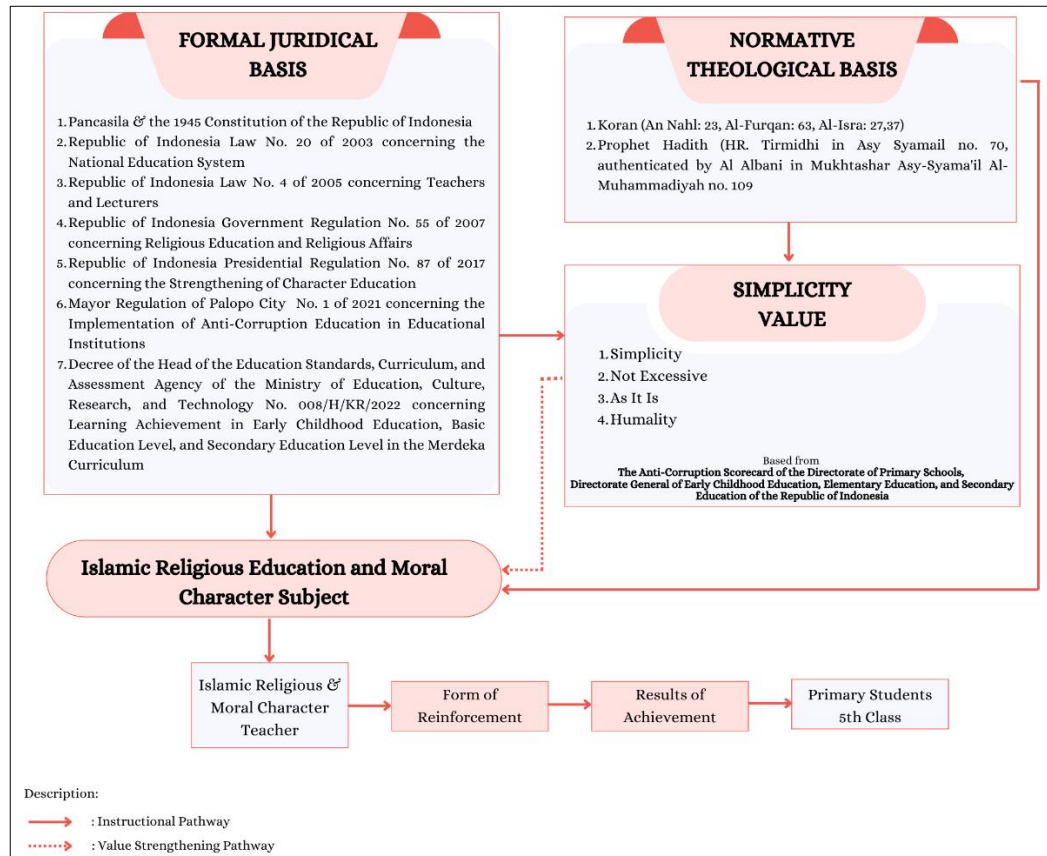
Figure 1. Flow of Research Framework

The conceptual framework in the provided image outlines the integration of Islamic Religious Education and moral character development within the Indonesian primary education system, specifically for 5th-grade students. It is anchored on a dual foundation: a formal juridical basis and a normative theological basis. The formal juridical basis encompasses the Indonesian Constitution, various national laws concerning education and religious affairs, and specific decrees related to education standards and curriculum. Meanwhile, the normative theological basis is derived from Islamic teachings, including the Quran and authenticated Hadiths.

Central to the curriculum is promoting the value of simplicity, which is articulated through principles such as simplicity, avoiding excess, acceptance, and humility. These values are instructed and reinforced by teachers in the classroom to achieve desired educational outcomes, signifying the development of the student's character in line with Islamic principles (Kopetz, 2019; Solihin et al., 2020; Yumnah, 2021). Although the specific results of these educational achievements are not detailed in the image, they presumably pertain to the moral and religious growth expected of the students.

The framework indicates the instructional pathway of direct teaching methods and a value-strengthening pathway that ensures the core value of simplicity is woven throughout the educational experience. The framework is credited to the Anti-Corruption Sourcebook provided by the Directorate of Primary Schools under the Directorate General of Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and

Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia, highlighting the country's commitment to combating corruption through education.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A systematic methodology is required to ensure high-quality results, obtain accurate data, and facilitate the research process in the field. The research methodology is a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods (Creswell. J.W., 1999). Combining these two research methods is considered suitable for complementing each other's data (Doyle et al., 2009) necessary for this study. Refer to the flowchart diagram below for a clearer understanding of the research stages.
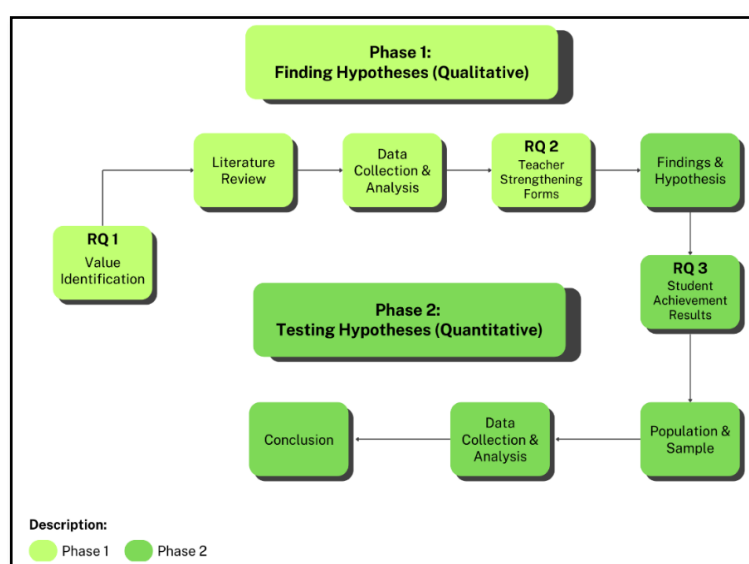

Figure 2. Research flow using sequential exploratory research design (Adapted from Creswell in Malini H, 2020)

3.2 Research Setting and Participant

This study is conducted in Palopo City, South Sulawesi, covering nine districts that accommodate 81 primary educational institutions, comprising secular elementary schools (SD) and Islamic elementary schools (MI). The combined student enrollment in these institutions totals 17,647 (Dapodikdasmen, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). Employing the Slovin formula, a sample of 27 educators was meticulously chosen for this research. The methodology for selecting educator participants employed a non-probability and purposive sampling technique based on well-defined criteria tailored to the study's focus on Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. These criteria stipulated that the sampled schools must primarily consist of teachers and students practicing Islam, which aligns with the study's emphasis on Islamic pedagogical content.

Additionally, the educators selected for the sample must actively teach the Islamic Religious Education and Character Education curricula, embodying the

transmission of the studied values. Furthermore, the student participants were specified to be Muslim fifth graders, ensuring that the sample demographic aligns appropriately with the intended audience for the educational content regarding age and academic stage. This targeted sampling approach strategically focuses the research on a demographic cohort well-suited to provide insights into the instructional impact of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education on students' understanding of justice values. Concurrently, from the entire student population across all primary educational settings in Palopo City, 100 fifth-grade Muslim students were selected using the Slovin formula to ensure a representative cross-section of the student body, enhancing the credibility of the study's findings.

3.3. Research Instrument

The research team observed the Islamic religious education and character education learning processes in 27 primary education units (SD/MI) in Palopo City, which had been predetermined as samples. The research team conducted the interview process with 27 educators/teachers of Islamic religious education and character education selected as informants based on previous school sampling. Questions and responses were recorded using devices to facilitate verbatim and substantial transcription of the interview results for subsequent stages. The questionnaire containing a series of statements proposed by the research team was administered in two sessions at different times. The research team assessed each received response using the Guttman scale. For each positive statement item, a score of 1 was given if in agreement and a score of 0 if not in agreement. Furthermore, for each negative statement item, a score of 1 was given if not in agreement and a score of 0 if in agreement.

3.4 Data Collection Technique

The data collection method in this research is divided into two stages: qualitative and quantitative. In the qualitative stage, an analysis is conducted on the consistency of the content in Islamic religious education and character education books with anti-radicalism and anti-corruption values. The results of this analysis are used to determine relevant indicators and sub-indicators as the basis for developing interview guidelines for teachers and questionnaires for students. Subsequently, the research team conducted observations and interviews with 27 public and private elementary school educators. In the quantitative stage, a validated questionnaire instrument is utilized, which is administered to the sample students after an explanation of the questionnaire filling process.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Analysis of the Compatibility of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education Materials with the Indicators of Simplicity Values

Education in Islam and the cultivation of character aligned with the principle of simplicity are anchored on ethical pillars such as honesty, transparency, and integrity that extend across various dimensions of life (Asefi et al., 2019). Islamic religious education, within its framework, provides a robust moral foundation for individuals to

cultivate a disposition of simplicity (Bucky Wibawa Karya Guna et al., 2024). It is because, in Islam, ethical principles such as honesty, justice, and integrity are taught as doctrines and expected to be internalized as guides to avoid extravagant or disproportionate practices in life (Oktio Frenki Biantoro, 2019).

On the other hand, character development plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' characters oriented towards simplicity and humility (Rasdi et al., 2021). Values such as politeness, humility, and honesty promoted through character education motivate individuals to choose a simple lifestyle, avoiding tendencies towards luxury or excessive desires (Bustan & Mailani, 2022; Dewantara et al., 2021). Through the internalization of moral values, individuals become more committed to integrity and morality, realizing that simplicity is not just about material deficiency but more a reflection of transcendent value priorities over material wealth (Heryanto et al., 2023; Solihin et al., 2020). Furthermore, the alignment between Islamic religious education and character education materials with the value of simplicity, as validated by experts, can be illustrated through the following table, which outlines the compatibility of materials with specific indicators:

Table 1. Concept Map of the Compatibility of Indicators of Simplicity Values in the Islamic Religious Education and Character Education Book for Grade V

Value Indicator	Matter Topics	Sub-Value Indicators		Matter Discussion
Simplicity	**Chapter 2** Getting Closer to the Names of Allah	1	Simplicity	**Chapter** 3 (p. 74)
	Chapter 3 I Am a Pious Child	2	Not Excessive	**Chapter** 10 (p. 234)
	Chapter 5 Emulating the Struggle of the Prophet Muhammad	3	As It Is	*Not Found*
	Chapter 8 The Joy of Friendship	4	Humility	**Chapter** 2 (p. 37,47)
	Chapter 10 Emulation of the Rightly Guided Caliphs			**Chapter** 3 (p. 67) **Chapter** 5 (p. 120) **Chapter** 8 (p. 196,199) **Chapter** 10 (p. 233,234)

This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating ethical and moral values in education to develop individuals who are not only academically proficient but also morally and ethically strong, with simplicity as one of their core values.

4.2 Ways in Which Teachers Reinforce the Value of Simplicity through the Content of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in Primary Education Units in Palopo City

Subsequently, the results of field research interviews were subsequently presented with informants (Islamic religious education and character education teachers). The interview data were processed using the N-Vivo 12 Plus application. The findings are as follows:
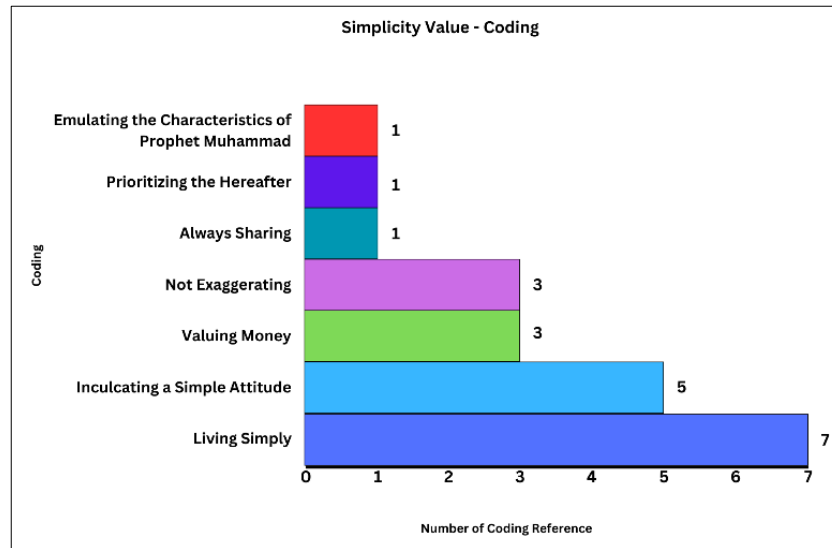
Figure 3. Coding Reference for the Value of Simplicity

The interview results involving 21 out of 27 teachers, analyzed using the coding reference feature, revealed various efforts to strengthen the understanding and application of the value of simplicity in the Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning processes. These efforts include living simply (performed by seven informants), instilling a simple attitude (performed by five informants), valuing money and not being excessive (performed by three informants each), emulating the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad, prioritizing the Hereafter, and always sharing (performed by one informant each). From the interview findings, it can be concluded that the efforts to reinforce the values of simplicity in learning are predominantly carried out through the aspect of living simply. This finding is consistent with the four sub-indicators of anti-corruption values under the simplicity indicator, which include values such as "simplicity", "not excessive", "as it is", and "humility".

In strengthening the value of simplicity in learning, Islamic religious education and character education teachers in Palopo City have several concrete actions that can be taken. Firstly, they teach students the value of simplicity, such as appreciating what they have and not overly focusing on expensive items or things (Solihin et al., 2020). Furthermore, teachers set an example by wearing simple clothing or using items that are not overly luxurious, thus fostering a positive attitude towards simplicity (Yumnah, 2021).

Additionally, they reduce the use of luxurious items during teaching or classroom activities and teach students to share with others by collecting unused items and donating them to those in need. Teachers also organize simple activities, such as school clean-up campaigns, to demonstrate that simple activities can significantly benefit others and the environment. They implement practical teaching methods in the classroom, such as making crafts from recycled items or teaching how to make simple toys, to show that simplicity can create beneficial things (Aksinudin et al., 2022; Marhayati & Chandra, 2021; M. A. Rahman, 2022). Lastly, teachers should avoid excessive praise or awards for students so that students understand that achievement and the value of simplicity are more important than excessive praise or awards

(Muhsan & Abdul Haris, 2022). Through these efforts, it is hoped that students can understand and apply the values of simplicity in their daily lives effectively.

4.3 Understanding of Students Towards the Value of Simplicity through the Content of Religious Education and Character Education in Primary Education Units in Palopo City

The analysis of the Simplicity Value Questionnaire among elementary school students in Palopo City highlighted invalid items due to their failure to meet statistical validity criteria, influenced by the diverse experiences of the children shaped by geographical, economic, and educational factors. This diversity impacts their understanding of corruption, emphasizing the necessity for nuanced questionnaire design that considers the varied social and cultural backgrounds, subjective interpretations, and psychometric factors such as memory and concentration. The subsequent refinement and testing of the questionnaire revealed varying levels of understanding of anti-corruption values among the students, with a significant portion demonstrating good to very good comprehension, attributable to the effective integration of simplicity principles into the curriculum.

Despite the positive outcomes, with 67% of students showing a good understanding of anti-corruption values, 19% scored poorly, indicating the need for further educational interventions. It suggests opportunities for educators to enhance learning processes through improved content presentation, teaching methodologies, and the implementation of character education. Continuous efforts and innovative teaching strategies are essential to ensure that all students achieve a comprehensive understanding and internalization of the value of simplicity, ultimately fostering a generation in Palopo City that upholds integrity, honesty, and resilience against corruption.

The initiative to reinforce simplicity values across various sectors has made significant strides towards achieving integrity, reducing corruption, and fostering a culture of honesty and ethical behaviour, notably through enhancing students' comprehension and engagement with simplicity principles (Muhajir, 2022; Yumnah, 2021). Incorporating these values into educational frameworks has effectively raised awareness among students, facilitated ethical decision-making, and fostered an understanding of corruption's detrimental effects on society (Angelia et al., 2022; Kusumaning Ayu et al., 2022). The development of innovative teaching strategies and resources, including interactive learning experiences and project-based learning, has furthered this cause, leading to positive behavioural changes among students towards honesty, responsibility, and ethical conduct, indicating a successful internalization of simplicity principles essential for societal goals against corruption (Dasmana et al., 2022; Mappaenre et al., 2023; A. Rahman et al., 2021; Sugiarto & Rachmadhani, 2022)

Promoting simplicity extends beyond educational settings, enhancing community awareness and involvement in anti-corruption efforts and influencing policy and governance towards transparency, accountability, and ethical governance (Solihin et al., 2020). Engaging a wider audience, including parents and community leaders, in simplicity and ethics discussions boosts collective anti-corruption initiatives, while policy reforms advocating for simplicity can embed these values more deeply in the societal fabric (Priyanto, 2020; Trisakti Handayani, 2021). These

multifaceted achievements highlight the crucial roles of education, community engagement, and policy reform in building a more ethical, just, and corruption-resistant society, underscoring the transformative power of simplicity values in fostering societal change (Yumnah, 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The integration of simplicity values into Islamic Religious Education and Character Education is a testament to the transformative power of education. It underscores the importance of nurturing ethical virtues alongside academic knowledge, aiming to develop individuals who are knowledgeable, morally resilient, and committed to the principles of honesty and integrity. As this study suggests, the path toward achieving such outcomes involves a dynamic and reflective educational process that continually adapts to meet the diverse needs of students and society. Through sustained efforts and quality education, it is hoped that future generations in Palopo City and beyond will emerge as champions of simplicity, integrity, and anti-corruption, contributing positively to the fabric of society.

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