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Implementation of The Islamic Character Building (ICB) Program as an Alternative Model of Islamic Religious Education in Shaping The Islamic Character of Students at Sma Islam Plus Adzkia Medan

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A B S T R A C T

The increasingly worrying practice of free association and social life, especially among adolescents, is caused by some members of society being disoriented in living their lives. This study aims to examine the implementation of the Islamic Character Building Program (KMA) at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan as a form of renewal in the general Islamic Religious Education curriculum to shape Islamic character in students. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the implementation strategy, obstacles encountered, and the program's success rate in shaping student character. The results show that the success of the KMA program is supported by three main factors: strengthening the emotional bond between educators and students, the use of daily journals as a means of self-reflection, and a personal approach in addressing behavioral problems. On the other hand, this program faces obstacles in the form of the strong influence of digital media and consumer culture among students. The implications of these findings contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of Islamic-based character education amidst the challenges of character education in the digital era and the weaknesses of conventional Islamic Religious Education learning.

1. Introduction

In this modern era, society has undergone many character changes, with the majority of people moving away from religious values, particularly Islamic ones. This is evident in the increasingly worrying free association and lifestyle practices of some citizens, as they lack direction in their lives. A widespread crisis in matters of faith and worldly transactions has begun to erode the nation's population toward a lifestyle of instant gratification and sophistication, leading some to abandon their

religion (Nur & Naimi, 2023). Therefore, it is important for schools to maximize character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. This is in line with the findings of Bagus and Muh (2025) who stated that character education programs are not formulated from the top down, but rather arise from the collective concerns of leaders and teachers regarding the moral challenges in the digital era and the need to fortify students from extreme thinking, in line with the vision of the madrasah (Permadi & Achadi, 2025).

Concerns about this situation prompted SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan to introduce the Islamic Character Building (ICB) program as an alternative model to replace Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This program was born from educators' concerns about Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, which was deemed too rigid, relying on one-way lecture methods, and only focusing on justifying halal and haram (permissible) without addressing the aspect of character building in a concrete way. ICB was designed with a more flexible and contextual approach, emphasizing the internalization of Islamic values into students' attitudes and behavior, in line with the views of Suyadi (2020) that character building is a systematic process to form students who are moral, responsible, and able to interact well in social life (Suyadi, 2020). The ICB program not only focuses on the cognitive aspects of religion, but also on the habituation of Islamic values and practices in students' daily activities.

This research was conducted at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan, a school in Medan with a highly supportive environment and systematic curriculum, making it a good learning environment for developing students' Islamic character. The school also has adequate facilities to support teaching and learning activities. This research has its own unique characteristics compared to previous studies. Unlike previous studies Nur & Aimi (2023) which examines the ICB program at SMP IT Nurul Azmi Medan at the junior high school level, this research focuses on the senior high school level with the characteristics of student development that are more complex emotionally and socially (Nur & Naimi, 2023).

While previous studies on Islamic Religious Education generally only highlight general aspects of the curriculum and learning methods, this study specifically examines the institutional transformation from Islamic Religious Education to ICB as a systematic and structured replacement subject. Another unique aspect of this study is its object, SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan, which has formally eliminated Islamic Religious Education and replaced it entirely with the ICB program since 2022, a phenomenon that has not been widely studied in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia. Therefore, this study contributes to enriching the scientific literature on Islamic character education through an innovative, contextual and applicable approach.

This study aims to identify the basis behind the transformation of the Islamic Religious Education subject into the Islamic Character Building (ICB) program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan, describe the implementation of the ICB program for students, and analyze the obstacles faced in implementing the program.

2. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative research method with a case study approach (Nurahma & Hendriani, 2021). A case study is a type of research that intensively and in-depth examines a particular individual, group, institution, or program over a specific period of time. This approach was chosen to examine the implementation of the Islamic Character Building (ICB) program in developing the Islamic character of students at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation, which were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model (Ayuni & Ritonga, 2025).

Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation (Moleong & Surjaman, 1989). Observations were conducted to directly observe teaching and learning activities in the Islamic Character Building subject at school, while interviews involved the subject teachers. Documentation was used to review school policies, activity programs, and records of student moral development as supporting data. This study aims to analyze all Islamic character building activities through the Islamic Character Building program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan. In qualitative research, the researcher conducted data analysis through several stages, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2013). And to validate the data, researchers use data validity techniques, namely time and source triangulation (Hidayah & Hulyana, 2025) .

3. Results and Discussion

Planning of Islamic Character Education Program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan

The Islamic Character Building (ICB) program at SMA Plus Adzkia Medan was first implemented in August 2022. The ICB program was designed to meet the needs of educational institutions, namely instilling Islamic character values in students, particularly amidst current moral and humane challenges. This is also expected to support the process of developing more mature, humane, and superior student character, in accordance with Islamic teachings. The ICB program focuses not only on the cognitive aspects of religion but also on instilling Islamic values and practices in students' daily lives. It is also recommended that research findings be linked to character education theory, Islamic education theory, and relevant previous research on Islamic character formation in schools. Discussions connected to theory will strengthen scientific arguments and demonstrate the research's contribution to the development of a character-based Islamic Religious Education model.

This is in line with the theory of character education according to Thomas Lickona, who stated that character education according to Thomas Lickona contains three main elements, namely knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good. A person's character is not only because he knows what is right, but also because he has an inner drive to do what is right and consistently applies it in everyday life

(Suprayitno & Wahyudi, 2020). A person's faith values are the whole person who expresses themselves in the form of physical and spiritual behavior, and they are the fundamental driving/enforcing force for a person's behavior (Somantri & Arifin, 2023). Educational institutions should instill noble morals like the morals of the Prophet as in the words of the Qur'an Surah Al-Ahzab verse 21.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُوْلِ اللهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوْا اللهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الأَخِرَوَذَكَرَاللهَ كَثِيْرًا

Meaning: "Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow for him who hopes for (the mercy of) Allah SWT and the Last Day and remembers Allah SWT much." (RI, 2022). In Ibn Kathir's interpretation, it is explained that surah al-ahzab verse 21 is the biggest main proposition, which recommends us all to follow the Prophet Muhammad in all his words, deeds and steps. Therefore Allah SWT. SWT. calls on the believers to follow the adab of Rasulullah SAW in the war of Ahzab, especially in terms of patience, steadfastness, alertness and struggle, and to continue waiting for a way out from Allah Swt (Darwin & Nasution, 2023).

Humans are essentially spiritual beings living in this world. The Prophet was sent to restore the essence of humanity, which had been contaminated by the various impacts and attractions of entities, through the principle of re-functioning fundamentalism and noble morals (human integrity) (Septian & B.S, 2021). The Planning of the Islamic Character Program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan can be seen in Figure 1.

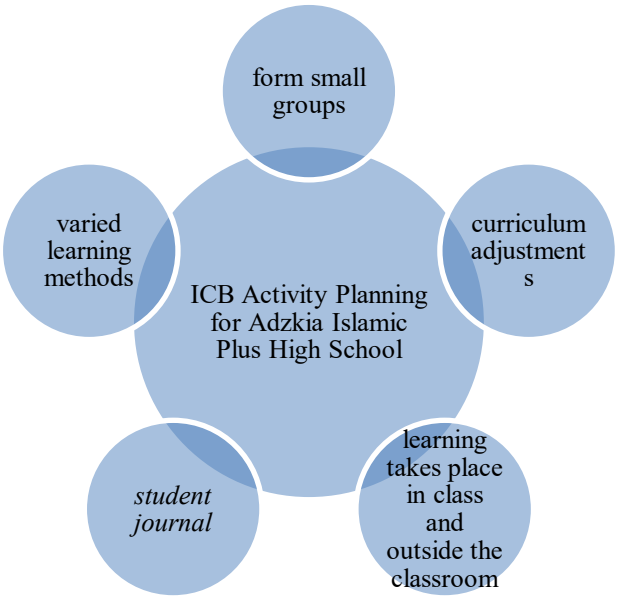

Figure 1. Activity Planning

Implementation of the Islamic Character Education Program at Adzkia Plus Islamic High School, Medan

a. form small groups

In this case, students share opinions with two teachers in one ICB classroom. The teachers use modules in the direct learning process, adapting the Merdeka

curriculum and using textbooks specifically designed for ICB, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Material Book

This is supported by the student's statement *"I like having 2 teachers in 1 class because they can be more focused and explain the material in more detail"* (Abimanyu x X Imam Bonjol)

b. curriculum adjustment

The curriculum will then be adjusted to the national curriculum with specific discussions. In this regard, the teacher, Dani, emphasized, "There are not many themes discussed in the curriculum, but they all cover what the students need. We will discuss what the children need. After that, we will hold a light discussion in small groups and ask each child one by one about their news and what problems they are currently facing. However, all the children answered no. But we can see what the child is hiding, and then outside the classroom we will follow up again by calling the child during breaks or after school. This is called Adzkia Daily Discussion Islamic Character Building (ADD ICB) and provide treatment according to their needs" (interview, January 22, 2026) as shown in Figure 3.

Figure. 3 ICB activities

Students also agreed and expressed their opinions about the curriculum tailored to the ICB teachers. "*I like ICB classes because they often start with an icebreaker so I don't get sleepy when I get to the material. The teachers also often ask each student how they're doing."* (Kaniyya Hayyumi XII Princeton)

c. takes place in class and outside class

The ICB service, which takes place both in and outside of class, is part of the ICB program. Students can directly come to their ICB teacher and share what they feel and experience privately when they are embarrassed to talk in class. This must be handled by the assigned ICB teacher. Then, the ICB teacher directly calls the child who they see a change in character in class, asks what the child is experiencing and provides the right solution or treatment for the child's problem. The success of ICB itself is seen from several students who immediately come to their ICB teacher and immediately tell what they are suffering in class or outside of class, and they are comfortable with this, so whenever they have a problem they confidently tell it. With ADD ICB, students have benefited from the service, and this is what they've expressed. "*I think it's quite enjoyable because ADD ICB feels like a chat session, and the teachers also provide thoughtful advice*." (Kania XII Princeton)

In this case, Suryana et al. (2023) In my opinion, bonding or attachment in education can be understood as a close emotional relationship between a child and an educator or parent, which is formed through warm, consistent, and caring interactions (Suryana et al., 2023) The ICB program is certainly integrated into other subjects with the note that what you do with the ICB teacher also do with other subject teachers, prioritizing manners and ethics as number 1. ICB teachers also collaborate with other subject teachers to see the formation and development of student character, and other subject teachers can report to us what the students do.

d. *student journal*

ICB teachers continue to monitor student activities at home using student journals, which are useful for evaluating students' morals and religious practices, such as the five obligatory prayers and voluntary prayers, and even homework assistance, which is reviewed weekly by each ICB teacher. Student journal supervision involves collaboration between homeroom teachers, ICB teachers, and parents to validate what students write and do, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Student Journal

The Student Journal book has supported the development of Islamic character education taught in schools, with the attention of ICB teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents. Students have also expressed its benefits. "*The first impact is that students are more accustomed to scheduling and the basics of journaling, as well as managing their schedules for the long term*." (Naufal X Imam Bonjol)

e. Learning Methods

The learning method used to instill Islamic character in students utilizes open discussions, case studies, practice, and feedback. In general, learning through open discussions demonstrates several key principles: first, learning activities are no longer one-way but based on social interaction; second, students become active subjects responsible for their own learning process; and third, discussions serve as a medium for internalizing critical thinking skills, effective communication, and collaboration among students. Thus, implementing open discussions in learning can be a more meaningful alternative to traditional lecture methods, which tend to be passive and limited to merely conveying information. This finding indicates that students who are given the opportunity to discuss the material understand the material better because the discussion process encourages them to actively share opinions, evaluate each other's ideas, and formulate collective conclusions. The case study method then allows for detailed analysis of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of teaching and learning activities. This approach helps uncover various factors that influence the learning process, whether originating from teachers, students, or the school environment. For example, research (Fauziyah et al., 2022). shows that case studies are able to provide a systematic overview of learning management in certain situations, thus producing a more complete understanding of the educational practices studied.

Practical methods in learning provide students with opportunities to apply acquired knowledge in real-world situations. These activities can take the form of practice exercises, simulations, presentations, demonstrations, or project assignments designed to strengthen students' conceptual understanding and skills. Effective practical implementation requires feedback. Feedback is a teacher's response to student work or performance, aimed at correcting errors, strengthening understanding, and increasing motivation to learn. Constructive feedback helps students understand their learning progress and provides guidance on necessary corrective actions. Practical practice and feedback have a complementary relationship. Practical practice provides students with space to test their understanding, while feedback serves as a reflection on that practical practice. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, learning that emphasizes formative assessment relies heavily on continuous feedback to ensure the gradual development of student competencies. Therefore, practical practice and feedback are two essential components of a learning process oriented toward competency development. Practical practice allows students to learn through direct experience, while feedback ensures that the learning process is directed, reflective, and sustainable.

The methods chosen and adapted by the ICB teachers greatly assisted the students in the learning process, and they also shared their opinions. "*ICB learning is very*

exciting, not boring, and I really like the group discussion method with a circle seating arrangement." (Kania XII Princeton). It can be concluded that the Islamic Character Building (ICB) Program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan is a transformation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subject, designed in a varied and systematic way to shape students' noble character in accordance with Islamic teachings, emulating the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

This program implements a personalized approach through a two-teacher system with small groups of approximately 15 students. It utilizes a variety of learning methods such as open discussions, case studies, hands-on practice, and feedback, ensuring an active, interactive, and non-monotonous learning environment. Character building not only takes place in the classroom but also continues outside the classroom through the ICB ADD service and Student Journal monitoring, which involves collaboration between ICB teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents. This ensures comprehensive monitoring of students' religious and moral development both at school and at home. The success of this program is underpinned by a strong bond between teachers and students, which creates a sense of security and trust, enabling students to openly address their problems and readily accept solutions. Thus, ICB demonstrates that effective Islamic character education requires an integrated, personalized, and sustainable approach, not simply the transfer of religious knowledge but rather the holistic development of an Islamic personality in each student.

Development strategy for the Islamic Character Building (ICB) Program as an alternative model for Islamic religious education at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan

Looking at the facts, the teaching and learning activities of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools still face various challenges in their implementation. In this case, SMA Islam Plus Adzkia updated the PAI subject to become Islamic Character Building (ICB). Where teachers are worried about the concern of PAI learning activities being very rigid and monotonous, because students follow books too much and there is a lack of active student roles in class. The components of PAI curriculum development include objectives, content/material, learning strategies, and evaluation, which must be arranged systematically and integrated (Muhadi & Widyaningsih, 2025).

This was emphasized by Mualim Dani, the ICB teacher. He stated that the ICB program arose from anxiety and anxiety in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. According to him, our leaders and other teachers saw it as too rigid, focusing too much on chapters in textbooks. Therefore, it needed to be reformed from the old method of lectures, one-way communication, and justification, which, in essence, is prohibited. It should be more flexible and relevant to children's problems. Students also shared their opinions on the ICB program, as follows. *"With ICB lessons, in my opinion, ICB lessons are more detailed or clearer in discussing a material, both the material and the practices."* (Abimanyu X Imam Bonjol)

According to Suyadi (2020), character building in education is a systematic process to shape the values, attitudes, and behavior of students so that they develop into individuals who are moral, responsible, and able to interact well in social life (Suyadi, 2020). The success of the Islamic Character Building (ICB) program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan is inseparable from several strategies, including:

a. First, strengthening the emotional bond between educators and students is the main foundation of the character-building process. Consistently building closeness allows students to feel safe and open about the problems they face, both at school and at home. Suryana (2023) emphasized that the emotional bond between educators and students significantly influences a child's overall social, moral, and personality development (Suryana et al., 2023). Supported by the findings of Yulia and Muhammad (2025), the dominant method is the authoritative approach, which balances assertiveness and emotional support (Samiha & Fauzi, 2025).
b. Second, the use of student journals as a tool for monitoring students' daily worship and behavior helps strengthen the ongoing internalization of Islamic values.
c. Third, a personalized approach through private services and follow-up outside of class provides space for each student to receive guidance tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Furthermore, consistent and targeted feedback can increase student motivation while encouraging gradual behavioral improvements.

The transformation of student character as a result of the ICB program is evident in a number of directly observable behavioral changes. Students who previously failed to perform ablution properly before prayer, after receiving intensive guidance from ICB teachers, gradually showed improvements in their worship procedures. Similarly, students who were initially withdrawn and reluctant to communicate with their parents, after undergoing personal development, began to show openness and improvements in their family relationships. These changes indicate that the habit-based approach implemented by the ICB program is able to touch the dimensions of student character more deeply than a purely normative approach (Yustiari, 2024). Continuous mentoring has been proven to be effective in fostering a sense of responsibility, building positive habits, and forming the character of students as a whole, not only in academic aspects but also in moral and spiritual aspects. This is in line with the findings of Davinda and Hafidz (2025) who stated that supporting factors for character formation include the religious environment and active involvement of parents (Saputra & Hafidz, 2025). They have clearly felt the results of this Islamic character development, and they expressed it as follows: *"I have become more disciplined in my worship and have learned more about the heavenly paths*." (Kania XII Princeton)

Before the ICB program was implemented, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan tended to be one-way, focused on mastering textbook material and lacking a focus on behavioral habits in daily life. Students passively participated in the lessons without any opportunity to discuss real-life problems. This situation resulted in a minimal connection between the

material learned and their actual behavior outside of class. Since the ICB program was implemented in August 2022, a significant shift has occurred in the learning dynamics. Students no longer simply receive material cognitively, but are actively involved in open discussions, self-reflection through daily journals, and ongoing, personal character development. This change reinforces the view Suyadi (2020) that effective character education requires active student involvement in the process of internalizing values, not simply passively receiving information (Suyadi, 2020).

Evaluation of student character during the program in Forming Islamic Character of Students from the Islamic Character Building Program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan

Islamic Character Building (ICB) is an activity that delivers Islamic religious education materials and discussions in small groups of several students, accompanied by a religious teacher (mualim/mualimah) for each group. This weekly activity aims to foster and shape Islamic character and the Pancasila student profile in students. Hopefully, this program will develop students with noble morals, intelligence, and resilience, who will become the next generation who will build this nation in the future. An evaluation of the Islamic Character Building (ICB) program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan shows positive character development. While the specific evaluation report is internal, the following are key highlights of the program:

1. Evaluation of the Implementation and Success of the Islamic Character Building Program

a. Islamic Character: Religious guidance activities and small group discussions, guided by mu'alim/mu'alimah, successfully fostered strong personalities and noble morals.

b. Curriculum Integration: This program successfully integrated Islamic values with the Pancasila Student Profile indicators.

c. Dormitory Environment: The evaluation showed that the school's dormitory system significantly supported the success of the ICB program, providing a consistent space for daily practice of worship and morals. Instagram ·smaislamplusadzkiamedan

2. Challenges and Areas for Development of Learning Methods: To avoid boredom, internal school evaluations typically encourage the use of digital media (such as interactive videos and presentations) to make religious material more easily understood. Personal Guidance: The main challenge is maintaining the ratio of students to mentors (mu'alim) so that counseling and evaluation of each student's spiritual development are effective.

Although the ICB program has shown positive results, its implementation is not free from various obstacles that require serious attention.

1. The first challenge relates to the implementation of religious observances, where some students are still found performing prayers without

first performing proper ablution (wudu), requiring direct supervision and special guidance from ICB teachers.

2. The second challenge concerns the influence of digital media on students' speech, given that uncontrolled exposure to digital content can lead to expressions inconsistent with Islamic values.

3. The third challenge relates to students' behavior and manners toward their parents, as evidenced by the phone call program at the second tenth-grade meeting, where several students were still reluctant to apologize and speak politely to their parents.

To address these issues, teachers develop strategies. The strategy employed by ICB teachers involves rewards provided directly by the school. ICB teachers provide rewards by assessing their students. This is supported by findings by Hayatun et al. (2025), who stated that to overcome obstacles in learning, teachers implement differentiated learning strategies, vocabulary grouping, and build positive emotional relationships with students (Hayatun et al., 2025). ICB teachers will observe changes in their students before and after guidance and will give them rewards. They will receive rewards for performing prayers according to Islamic law, completing study journals, teacher reports that students have behaved well, and they will receive rewards for gathering in the hall on time and with good behavior. The rewards are simple but memorable. ICB teachers give rewards in the form of ice cream and other snacks. Example:

1. Reprimand and guide a child who prays but does not perform ablution. Gradually, the child changes and begins to perform ablution and pray according to Islamic law.

2. Guide and build communication with a child experiencing a gap with his parents. This was successfully carried out by ICB teachers, and under their supervision, the child reported on the development of his relationship with his parents, so that he is now very open with his parents, who were previously very closed.

3. Cultivate the habit of expressing gratitude. This behavior is observed when students are helped crossing the street to school or in the parking lot. Students are required to express their appreciation for the security guard's behavior by saying "thank you" for their assistance.

And ICB teachers monitor and question security guards about children who don't say "thank you" when helped to cross the street. This will be followed up by calling the children and providing special treatment to help them change their bad behavior. This was emphasized (Priansa, 2018). Special treatment in education can be understood as a form of specific treatment or care provided to students according to their needs. This treatment aims to help students overcome learning difficulties while also developing their potential more optimally. In practice, treatment can take the form of additional guidance, material reinforcement, attitude development, or more intensive mentoring by educators (Yustiari, 2024). Special treatment functions to address learning difficulties, but it also plays a role in shaping positive habits and attitudes in students. Continuous mentoring can help increase learning motivation, foster a sense of responsibility, and foster better behavior in daily life.

Thus, treatment focuses not only on academic improvement but also on the overall character development of students. Although the ICB program has shown positive results, there are several points to highlight for future program development.

1. First, the sustainability of student character change still depends heavily on the intensity of ICB teacher supervision, raising questions about the extent to which the instilled values are truly internalized independently by students without the presence of a mentor. Lickona, as quoted by suprayitno & wahyudi (2020) emphasizes that true character is not only formed because of external supervision, but also because of a strong inner drive to do the right thing consistently (Suprayitno & Wahyudi, 2020).
2. Second, the ICB program does not yet have an academically standardized character evaluation instrument, so assessment of student development remains subjective and dependent on individual teacher observations. reminds us that contextual Islamic character education must be able to equip students with moral resilience that is not only functional in the school environment but also robust when faced with cultural pressures in community life.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of research and analysis of the implementation of the Islamic Character Building (ICB) Program at SMA Islam Plus Adzkia Medan, it can be concluded that this program is an effective innovation in religious education in shaping students' Islamic character. This program emphasizes the habituation of attitudes and behaviors according to Islamic teachings through an interactive, personal, and sustainable approach, and involves all teachers as character builders. The success of ICB is proven by positive changes in students' morals and ethics, which are supported by conducive school facilities and environments as well as systematic coaching strategies. Thus, ICB can be used as an alternative model in developing character education based on Islamic values that are relevant to the challenges of the times.

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