



ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A STUDY OF INDONESIAN STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the structure and level of Islamic character education among students of State Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia. Islamic character education plays an important role in shaping students' religious identity and ethical behavior in Islamic higher education. However, empirical studies examining its multidimensional structure and the contribution of each dimension remain limited. This research used a quantitative survey approach involving PTKIN students from Jakarta, West Java, and Banten. Data were analyzed using Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) framework. The findings show that the overall level of Islamic character education among students is moderate to high, indicating that Islamic values have been reasonably internalized in students' academic and social lives. All five dimensions significantly contribute to the construct, with love of knowledge emerging as the most dominant factor, followed by obedience and compliance, spirituality, moral and ethical values, and social responsibility. These findings highlight the importance of intellectual orientation and academic culture alongside religious practices and moral values. This study contributes to the conceptual understanding of Islamic character education and recommends strengthening integrative character education through academic culture, religious activities, and student social engagement in institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The discourse on Islamic character education has become an increasingly significant topic within global educational research, particularly in the context of moral development and value-based learning in higher education (Ismail, 2025). Character education is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar for building ethical societies and fostering responsible citizenship (Ismet et al., 2025; Utamirohmahsari, 2024). In Muslim-majority societies, Islamic character education plays an essential role in shaping individuals who possess both

intellectual competence and spiritual integrity (Surbakti et al., 2024; Wijaksono et al., 2024). Empirical evidence demonstrates a growing scholarly interest in this topic. A bibliometric analysis identified more than 200 Scopus-indexed publications on Islamic character education published between 2010 and 2023, indicating the increasing global relevance of this theme (Alhamuddin et al., 2022; Islamic et al., 2024). This number represents a considerable portion of the broader literature on character education worldwide. The increasing academic attention suggests that scholars view Islamic character education not merely as a religious discourse but also as an important framework for addressing contemporary moral challenges in education (Ismet et al., 2025; Jamil, 2024). Therefore, investigating the dynamics of Islamic character education in higher education institutions is essential for strengthening moral development and ensuring the sustainability of ethical values within modern academic environments.

Despite growing academic attention to Islamic character education, educational institutions continue to face persistent challenges in the internalization of ethical and religious values among students. Universities are expected not only to produce graduates with strong academic competence but also individuals who demonstrate integrity, responsibility, and ethical awareness (Kong, 2024; Sotiriadou et al., 2020). However, numerous studies indicate that moral inconsistencies remain a recurring issue within higher education environments (Kong, 2024; Pell & Amigud, 2023). These challenges are often associated with the gap between theoretical teaching of moral values and their practical implementation in students' daily lives (Afifah & Fadilah, 2023; Balakrishnan, 2023). Internal factors, such as weak moral commitment, and external factors, such as institutional culture or ineffective pedagogical strategies, can influence the formation of students' character (Daud et al., 2023). As a result, the expected outcomes of character education are not always fully achieved. This situation highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how Islamic character education manifests among university students, particularly within Islamic higher education institutions, where religious values are expected to be deeply embedded in the educational process (Mujahid, 2021).

Islamic character education can be understood as an educational process aimed at cultivating values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect Islamic teachings in both spiritual and social dimensions. Scholars argue that Islamic character education involves the development of moral consciousness, spiritual devotion, and responsible social behavior among learners (Islamic et al., 2024). Its primary objective is to nurture individuals who can balance their relationship with God and with other human beings in accordance with Islamic ethical principles (Kader, 2021). Previous research has identified several key dimensions of Islamic character education, including spiritual devotion, moral and ethical conduct, social responsibility, intellectual curiosity, and obedience to religious teachings (Mujahid, 2021). These dimensions collectively shape students' moral framework and guide their behavior in both academic and social contexts. Through these dimensions, Islamic character education seeks to build positive personal qualities while preventing negative behaviors that contradict ethical and religious norms

(Solihin et al., 2020). Consequently, understanding how these dimensions manifest among students is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of character education in Islamic higher education institutions.

A number of studies have explored the implementation of Islamic character education within various educational settings. Some researchers emphasize the importance of experiential learning and inclusive educational strategies in strengthening students' religious character (Pujianti & Nugraha, 2024). For instance, Nuryadi et al. (2025) argue that character development is more effective when students are actively involved in real social experiences that allow them to practice ethical values in real-life situations. Other scholars highlight the role of academic subjects in embedding religious values within the learning process. Husna et al. (2024) demonstrate that language learning, particularly Arabic instruction in Islamic universities, can strengthen students' religious attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, Widodo et al., (2025) shows that integrating prophetic values into Indonesian language textbooks contributes to the cultivation of ethical awareness among students. These findings indicate that character education can be integrated across various disciplines and learning activities, suggesting that the formation of Islamic character is not limited to religious subjects alone but can be embedded throughout the educational curriculum (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023).

In addition to curriculum integration, other scholars emphasize the importance of value internalization within classroom interactions. Mustakim et al., (2024) argue that the learning process should move beyond the transmission of knowledge toward the internalization of ethical and spiritual values. Through reflective discussions, mentoring, and dialogical learning environments, educators can encourage students to develop moral awareness and social responsibility (Evans et al., 2022). Research also highlights that students' religious commitment and belief systems play an important role in shaping their character development. Ebrahimi et al. (2021) found that strong religious belief is one of the most influential factors explaining variations in Islamic character levels among university students. These findings indicate that the success of Islamic character education is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and students' internal motivation (Warsah et al., 2024). However, despite these contributions, the existing literature remains fragmented in its findings regarding the actual level of Islamic character education among students in Islamic higher education institutions.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into character education practices, significant research gaps remain. Most existing studies focus primarily on pedagogical strategies or curriculum integration rather than systematically measuring the overall level of Islamic character among students (Iman, 2025). Furthermore, many studies examine character education at the school level, while research focusing specifically on students in Islamic higher education institutions remains relatively limited (Mujahid, 2021). As a result, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how Islamic character education manifests among university students who are expected to become future intellectual and religious leaders in society. This lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult for

policymakers and educational institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of character education programs currently implemented in Islamic universities (Amirudin, 2020). Addressing this research gap is crucial for developing more evidence-based strategies in strengthening Islamic character education at the higher education level.

This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to the existing literature by examining the level and dimensions of Islamic character education among students in Islamic higher education institutions. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on pedagogical models or curriculum design, this research emphasizes measuring and analyzing students' Islamic character across multiple dimensions. By adopting a multidimensional framework encompassing spiritual devotion, moral and ethical behavior, social responsibility, love of knowledge, and obedience to religious teachings, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic character manifests among university students. This multidimensional approach represents a significant advancement in the study of Islamic character education, as it enables researchers to examine both internal belief systems and observable behavioral patterns simultaneously.

From this perspective, the central research problem addressed in this study is how Islamic character education manifests among students in Islamic higher education institutions, and which dimensions demonstrate stronger or weaker levels of development. This study argues that understanding the multidimensional structure of Islamic character education is essential for designing more effective educational interventions. By providing empirical evidence regarding the level of Islamic character among university students, this research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective character education policies and teaching strategies. Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to support Islamic higher education institutions in strengthening their role in producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also ethically responsible and spiritually grounded.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study aims to empirically test the construct model of Islamic Character Education through statistical analysis based on Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Kawar et al., 2024; Strijker et al., 2020). The survey method was used to collect primary data from respondents using a structured questionnaire based on conceptually formulated operational indicators for the variables. The questionnaire is a 4-point Likert scale with ratings of 1 (very inappropriate), 2 (inappropriate), 3 (appropriate), and 4 (very appropriate) for positive statement items. As for negative statement items with rating categories of 1 (very appropriate), 2 (appropriate), 3 (not appropriate) and 4 (very non-appropriate).

The research focuses on students of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) in DKI Jakarta, West Java, and Banten. Specifically, this research was conducted at three institutions: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, UIN Sunan

Gunung Djati Bandung, and UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. The three universities were chosen because they represent large PTKIN in the strategic area of western Indonesia and have diverse student characteristics across social, cultural, and academic backgrounds. This diversity is considered relevant for testing the validity of the Islamic Character Education construct in a more comprehensive and contextual manner.

The population in this study comprised 73,240 active students registered at the three universities. The sample size was determined using the Isaac and Michael formula (Isaac & Michael, 1981) with a sampling error rate of 4.74%. Based on this calculation, a sample of 425 students was obtained. This amount is considered adequate for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), given that Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)-based measurement model analysis requires a relatively large sample size to produce stable, accurate, and generalizable parameter estimates.

The sampling technique used is quota sampling. This technique is carried out by determining the proportion of respondents from each university based on the characteristics of the existing population, so that each institution is represented proportionally in the research (Futri et al., 2022; Rukmana, 2024). Furthermore, respondents for each quota were selected using an accidental sampling technique, which involved selecting those the researcher happened to meet who were willing to complete the questionnaire.

The variable in this study is Islamic Character Education, which is positioned as a latent construct. This construct cannot be measured directly, so it is inferred from observed variables derived from theoretical studies. The operationalization of variables is carried out by reducing the construct of Islamic Character Education into five main dimensions, which are then described in terms of a number of measurement indicators. The following is an overview of the variables used in the main study:

Table 1. Variable Operationalization

Variable	Dimension	Indicators
Islamic Character Education	Spiritual Dimension (Hajaroh, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequency of Worship • Understanding of Religious Teachings • Participation in Religious Activities • Practice of Noble Character (<i>Akhlaq</i>)
	Moral and Ethical Dimension (Ismail, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility • Fairness • Participation in Social Activities
	Social Dimension (Munawarah, 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Awareness • Ability to Build Social Relationships
	Love for Knowledge Dimension (Hajaroh, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Motivation • Participation in Non-Formal Education

Obedience and Compliance Dimension (Hajaroh, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Time for Learning • Obedience to Religious Norms • Attitude toward Social Rules • Behavior in Accordance with Islamic Teachings
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Before the research instruments are made based on the operations of the above variables, which are used in the data collection process, a pilot survey is first conducted with 30 respondents to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments prepared. The following are the results of the instrument validity and reliability testing:

Table 2. Instrument Validity and Reliability Test Results

Construct	Item	Corrected Item Total Correlation	Ket	Alpha Cronbach's	Ket
Spiritual	P1	0.611	Valid	0.844	Reliabel
	P2	0.523	Valid		
	P3	0.799	Valid		
	P4	0.489	Valid		
	P5	0.697	Valid		
	P6	0.678	Valid		
	P7	0.527	Valid		
	P8	0.655	Valid		
Social	P9	0.487	Valid	0.812	Reliabel
	P10	0.339	Valid		
	P11	0.704	Valid		
	P12	0.738	Valid		
	P13	0.687	Valid		
	P14	0.763	Valid		
Sosial	P15	0.746	Valid	0.875	Reliabel
	P16	0.600	Valid		
	P17	0.638	Valid		
	P18	0.638	Valid		
	P19	0.726	Valid		
	P20	0.761	Valid		
Love for Science	P21	0.726	Valid	0.879	Reliabel
	P22	0.591	Valid		
	P23	0.691	Valid		
	P24	0.642	Valid		
	P25	0.775	Valid		
	P26	0.668	Valid		
Obedience and Obedience	P27	0.669	Valid	0.868	Reliabel
	P28	0.747	Valid		
	P29	0.663	Valid		
	P30	0.507	Valid		

The validity test of the instrument is carried out using the Corrected Item–Total Correlation value to find out the extent to which each statement item is able to represent the measured construct. An item is declared valid if it has a correlation value greater than 0.30 (Adriani et al., 2020). Based on the test results, all items in each construct have Corrected Item–Total Correlation values above 0.30, ranging from 0.339 to 0.799. Thus, all statement items (P1-P30) on the Islamic

Character Education variable were declared valid and feasible for use in the data collection process. Furthermore, a reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the instrument's internal consistency. The test results showed that the entire construct had a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), namely the Spiritual dimension of 0.844, Morals and Ethics of 0.812, Social of 0.875, Love of Science of 0.879, and Obedience and Obedience of 0.868. The value indicates that each construct has good reliability.

The data analysis method used to describe and test the construction of Islamic Character Education is Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). This approach is used to analyze the relationships among observed indicators, dimensions (first-order constructs), and the main latent construct (second-order construct). The process of processing and estimating the model was carried out with the help of SmartPLS software version 4, which is based on the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach (Hajaroh & Dwiningrum, 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Respondent Characteristics

The characteristics of the respondents in this study are presented to provide an overview of the profile of students who are research participants. The demographic information analyzed included gender, semester, living environment, school origin, pesantren experience, organizational activities, and monthly allowance.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics

Demografi	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	223	52.5%
Female	202	47.5%
Semester		
I	171	40.2%
III	119	28.0%
V	104	24.5%
VII	22	5.2%
> VII	9	2.1%
Residential Environment		
Countryside	147	34.6%
Urban	278	65.4%
School Origin		
SMA (Negeri)	62	14.6%
SMA (Swasta)	59	13.9%
SMK (Negeri)	11	2.6%
SMK (Swasta)	8	1.9%
MA (Negeri)	46	10.8%
MA (Swasta)	216	50.8%
Others	23	5.4%
Pesantren Experience		
Ya	292	68.7%
Tidak	133	31.3%

Organizational Activities		
Ya	328	77.2%
Tidak	97	22.8%
Pocket Money per Month		
Under Rp. 500.000,-	112	26.4%
Rp. 500.000 - Rp. 750.000,-	108	25.4%
Rp. 750.000 - Rp. 1.000.000,-	107	25.2%
Above Rp. 1.000.000,-	98	23.1%

Of the 425 respondents, 223 were men (52.5%), and 202 were women (47.5%). By semester, the majority of respondents were in the first semester (171 people, 40.2%), while the fewest were in the semester above VII (9 people, 2.1%). In terms of the residential environment, most of the respondents came from urban areas as many as 278 people (65.4%), while those from rural areas were 147 people (34.6%).

Based on school origin, the most respondents came from MA (Private) as many as 216 people (50.8%), while the least came from vocational schools (Private) as many as 8 people (1.9%). Furthermore, the majority of respondents had pesantren experience: 292 (68.7%), while those who did not numbered 133 (31.3%). In terms of organizational activities, most of the respondents were active in the organization as many as 328 people (77.2%), while 97 people (22.8%) were inactive. Meanwhile, based on the monthly allowance, the largest category was below IDR 500,000 for 112 people (26.4%), while the smallest was above IDR 1,000,000 for 98 people (23.1%).

Structural Modeling of Islamic Character Education for PTKIN Students

The structural modeling in this study aims to test and confirm the construct of Islamic Character Education among students at State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) using the Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) approach within Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The second-order approach is used because Islamic Character Education is conceptualized as a multidimensional latent construct comprising several main dimensions. Through this model, the relationships between the indicator and the dimension (first-order construct), and between the dimension and the second-order construct, are analyzed simultaneously.

In the measurement model, Islamic Character Education is built on five dimensions: spiritual, moral and ethical, social, love of knowledge, and obedience. Each dimension is measured through a number of observed indicators that represent students' religious practices, morals, social concerns, intellectual orientation, and normative compliance.

Parameter Estimation and Path Diagram Results

Below is a path diagram of the Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), along with the parameter estimates from the Partial Least Squares (PLS) estimation method. The diagram illustrates the relationship between measurement indicators and latent dimensions that form the construct of Islamic Character Education in PTKIN students. In addition, this diagram shows the

relationship between each dimension and the main latent construct, which is a second-order construct.

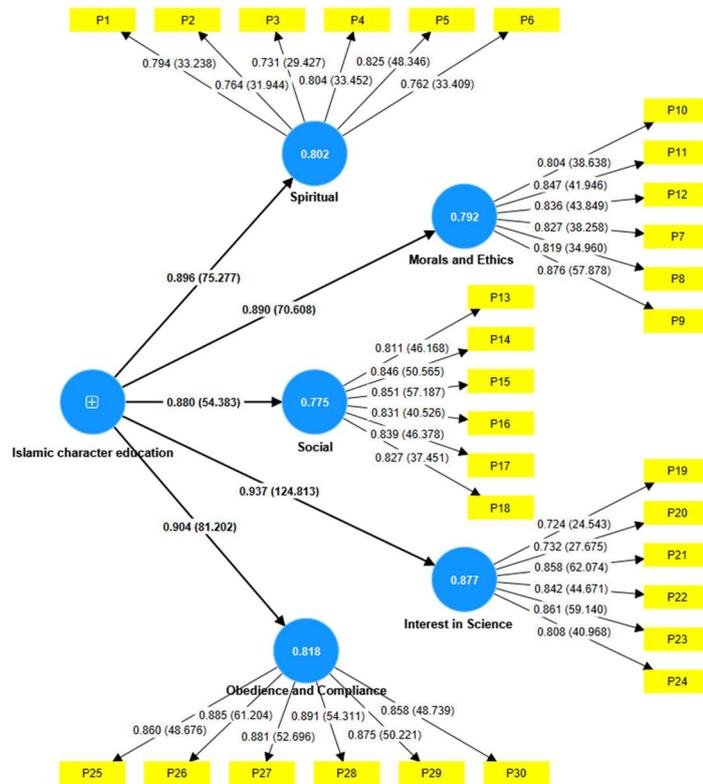


Figure 1. Path Diagram Results of Estimation of Islamic Character Education Parameters

Evaluation of Outer Model Suitability

An external model evaluation is conducted to ensure that each indicator makes a significant contribution to reflecting the dimensions that constitute the variables of Islamic Character Education. Testing of this measurement model includes validity tests and model reliability tests. Validity testing is carried out through convergent validity, which involves examining the loading factor and t-statistic for each indicator against the measured construct. Meanwhile, reliability testing assesses the consistency of measurement of observed variables within each construct, using Composite Reliability (CR) and Discriminant Validity (AVE) values. The following are the results of the first-order CFA measurement model, which describes the relationship between indicators and dimensions, and the second-order CFA measurement model, which describes the relationship between dimensions and the main construct of Islamic Character Education.

Table 4. Testing the Validity and Reliability of the Outer Islamic Character Education Model

Konstruk	Loading Factor	t _{hitung}	Composite Reliability (CR)	Discriminant Validity (AVE)	Verdict
1stCFA					

Konstruk	Loading Factor	t _{hitung}	Composite Reliability (CR)	Discriminant Validity (AVE)	Verdict
Spiritual					
P1	0.794	33.238	0.903	0.609	Valid and Reliabel
P2	0.764	31.944			
P3	0.731	29.427			
P4	0.804	33.452			
P5	0.825	48.346			
P6	0.762	33.409			
Morals and Ethics					
P7	0.827	38.258	0.933	0.698	Valid dan Reliabel
P8	0.819	34.960			
P9	0.876	57.878			
P10	0.804	38.638			
P11	0.847	41.946			
P12	0.836	43.849			
Social					
P13	0.811	46.168	0.932	0.696	Valid dan Reliabel
P14	0.846	50.565			
P15	0.851	57.187			
P16	0.831	40.526			
P17	0.839	46.378			
P18	0.827	37.451			
Love for Science					
P19	0.724	24.543	0.917	0.650	Valid dan Reliabel
P20	0.732	27.675			
P21	0.858	62.074			
P22	0.842	44.671			
P23	0.861	59.140			
P24	0.808	40.968			
Obedience					
P25	0.860	48.676	0.951	0.765	Valid dan Reliabel
P26	0.885	61.204			
P27	0.881	52.696			
P28	0.891	54.311			
P29	0.875	50.221			
P30	0.858	48.739			
2stCFA Pendidikan Karakter Islami					
Spiritual	0.896	75.277	0.956	0.813	Valid dan Reliabel
c	0.890	70.608			
Social	0.880	54.383			
Love for Science	0.937	124.813			
Obedience	0.904	81.202			

The table above shows that all standardized factor loadings in the first- and second-order CFA measurement models are good. This is shown by the t-calculated value being greater than the critical value ($t \geq 1.96$) and the standardized loading factor being ≥ 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating that all indicators are valid for measuring the construct under study. In the first-order

model of the CFA, the indicators are able to measure each of the spiritual, moral, and ethical dimensions, social, love for knowledge, and obedience. Meanwhile, in the second-order CFA model, these five dimensions have been shown to significantly shape the development of Islamic Character Education among PTKIN students. Thus, the measurement model used in this study was declared valid.

Based on the results of the outer model reliability test, all Construct Reliability values in spiritual, moral and ethical constructs, social, love for knowledge, and obedience were above the minimum limit of 0.70, and the Variance Extracted (AVE) value also exceeded the required limit of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that the reliability of the first-order CFA measurement model is in the good category. Thus, the indicators within each dimension show sufficient consistency in measuring the construct under study. Furthermore, in the second-order CFA measurement model, the five dimensions were also shown to measure the latent construct of Islamic Character Education properly and reliably. These results show that the measurement model used in the study has high internal consistency, making it suitable for further analysis.

Evaluation of the Suitability of the Inner Model

After evaluating the outer model, the next stage is to test the inner model. This evaluation aims to assess the model's overall suitability and its ability to explain the relationships between constructs. The suitability level of the structural model can be analyzed using the Q-Square predictive relevance value. The following presents the R-Square values, which indicate the extent to which each dimension contributes to the construction of Islamic Character Education.

Table 5. Inner Testing of Learning Quality Model

Konstruk	R-Square (R ²)
Spiritual	0.802
Morals and Ethics	0.792
Social	0.775
Love for Science	0.877
Obedience	0.818

Then the value of Q-Square is :

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R1^2)(1 - R2^2) (1 - R3^2) (1 - R4^2) (1 - R5^2)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.802)(1 - 0.792)(1 - 0.775)(1 - 0.877)(1 - 0.818)$$

$$Q^2 = 0.9998$$

Based on the Q-Square predictive relevance calculation, a value of 0.9998 was obtained. A Q-Square value greater than zero indicates that the model has good predictive ability in explaining the relationships between constructs in the research model. The closer the value is to 1, the higher the model's ability to explain the observed variance of data. Thus, the spiritual, moral and ethical, social, love of knowledge, and obedience can explain the construction of Islamic Character Education very well, such that the research model is considered to have a very good level of suitability.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that all dimensions, spiritual, moral and ethical, social, love for knowledge, and obedience and compliance significantly contribute to the formation of Islamic Character Education among students of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN). The results of the Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis show that each dimension has a significant loading factor ($p < 0.05$), indicating strong empirical support for the multidimensional structure of Islamic character. These findings reinforce the argument that Islamic character formation is a holistic construct integrating religious, intellectual, and social values. Previous studies also confirm that Islamic education aims to develop balanced individuals whose character is shaped through the integration of moral, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions (Juwairiyah & Fanani, 2025; Srinio et al., 2025). Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes the integration of faith, knowledge, and ethical conduct as the core foundation of character development (Ilmi et al., 2023; Mahmudulhassan et al., 2025; Sunardi et al., 2025). Therefore, the results of this study support the theoretical perspective that Islamic character education in higher education institutions is constructed through the interaction of multiple interrelated dimensions.

Among the five dimensions examined, the dimension of love for knowledge emerged as the most dominant factor in shaping Islamic Character Education. This result indicates that intellectual orientation and the motivation to pursue knowledge play a crucial role in the development of students' Islamic character. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, seeking knowledge is regarded as a form of worship and an essential means of strengthening faith and moral integrity. Classical Islamic scholars have long emphasized that knowledge serves as the foundation for ethical conduct and spiritual awareness (Busti et al., 2025; Elouazzani, 2024; Huda et al., 2016). This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing that academic engagement and intellectual curiosity significantly influence the development of religious and moral character among Muslim students (Khalid et al., 2020; Suryani & Muslim, 2024; Tabassum et al., 2024). Consequently, the strong contribution of the love-for-knowledge dimension in this study highlights the importance of strengthening academic culture and scholarly engagement in Islamic universities as a foundation for character development. The relative contribution of each dimension is illustrated in Figure below.

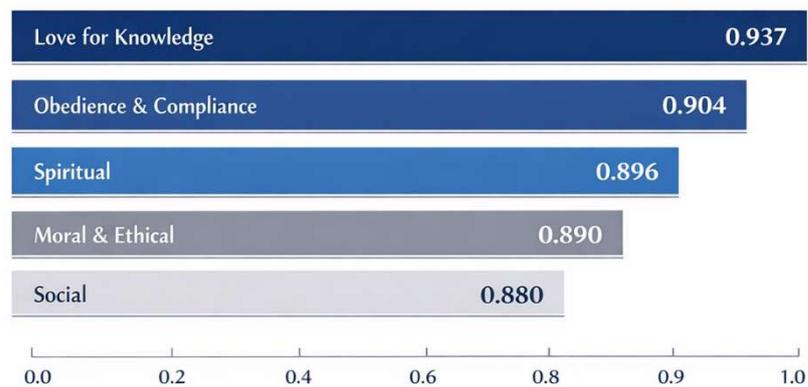


Figure 2. Relative Contribution of Each Dimension to Islamic Character Education

the relative contribution of each dimension in shaping Islamic Character Education among students of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN). The visualization shows that the love for knowledge dimension has the highest standardized loading factor (0.937), indicating that intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge constitute the most influential component in the formation of Islamic character. This finding reflects the central role of knowledge in the Islamic intellectual tradition, where the pursuit of knowledge is regarded as both a moral responsibility and a spiritual endeavor. The obedience and compliance dimension (0.904) and the spiritual dimension (0.896) also demonstrate strong contributions, suggesting that adherence to religious norms and engagement in spiritual practices remain essential elements in shaping students' character. Meanwhile, the moral and ethical dimension (0.890) and the social dimension (0.880), although slightly lower, still show substantial contributions to the overall construct. These results indicate that Islamic character education among PTKIN students is shaped by a balanced integration of intellectual orientation, spiritual awareness, moral values, and social responsibility, with intellectual engagement emerging as the dominant driving force within the multidimensional structure of Islamic character.

In addition to intellectual orientation, the dimensions of obedience and compliance and spirituality also make strong contributions to Islamic Character Education. These findings suggest that adherence to religious norms and consistent engagement in spiritual practices remain essential elements in shaping students' character. Islamic education emphasizes the balance between intellectual development and spiritual discipline as a fundamental element of character formation (Islamic et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021; Nursobah et al., 2025). Spiritual discipline in Islam is often cultivated through practices such as prayer, remembrance of God (*dhikr*), and moral self-regulation, which are considered central mechanisms for nurturing ethical awareness (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Hakim, 2025). Previous research also indicates that religious practices such as prayer, reflection, and adherence to Islamic ethical guidelines play an important role in strengthening students' moral commitment and identity (Ismet et al., 2025; Jamil, 2024; Latifah & Nurhikmah, 2024). Thus, the findings of this study confirm

that the formation of Islamic character among PTKIN students is strongly influenced by the integration of intellectual orientation, spiritual awareness, and moral discipline.

However, the descriptive analysis indicates that students' level of spirituality tends to be moderate. This finding indicates that although students generally understand the basic teachings of Islam and perform obligatory religious practices, participation in additional religious activities such as collective worship or religious study circles still varies among individuals. Similar findings were reported by Small, (2023), who argued that religiosity among university students often manifests in formal ritual practices but may not always extend to deeper participatory engagement in religious communities. Studies on youth religiosity also indicate that modern Muslim students frequently negotiate between institutional religious expectations and personal forms of spirituality (Aune et al., 2025; Herzog et al., 2020). Furthermore, research on Muslim youth spirituality suggests that educational environments should encourage reflective and participatory religious practices rather than focusing solely on ritual compliance (Lundie et al., 2022; Udemba, 2024). Therefore, strengthening religious programs and spiritual mentoring on campus could enhance students' internalization of spiritual values.

The moral and ethical dimension in this study shows a relatively high level among PTKIN students, indicating that moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and fairness have been well internalized. This finding aligns with the view that moral development constitutes the central goal of Islamic education. According to Halstead (2015), Islamic moral education aims to cultivate virtues such as justice, honesty, and social responsibility as the foundation of Muslim character. Classical Islamic scholarship also emphasizes the cultivation of *akhlaq* (moral character) as a central objective of education (Hibatillah & Husni, 2022; Trevathan, 2021). Similarly, studies on Islamic educational environments demonstrate that moral values are effectively transmitted through a combination of value-based learning, role modeling by educators, and social interaction within the academic community (Imron, 2024). Thus, the strong performance of the moral and ethical dimension in this study reflects the important role of Islamic universities in nurturing students' ethical awareness.

The social dimension of Islamic Character Education, however, was found to be at a moderate level. Although students demonstrate positive interpersonal attitudes and the ability to interact with others, their participation in social and community-oriented activities remains relatively limited. This finding is consistent with research in higher education, which shows that although students often hold positive social values, active engagement in community service depends heavily on institutional encouragement and program integration (Sá, 2023). Furthermore, studies on service-learning programs reveal that participation in community-based learning significantly enhances students' empathy, civic responsibility, and social awareness (Carlisle et al., 2020). Research in Islamic education also highlights that community engagement and social responsibility are important components of Islamic character formation, as Islam emphasizes

social solidarity (*ukhuwah*) and collective welfare (*maslahah*) (Anshori et al., 2024). These results suggest that strengthening community engagement programs and integrating social service activities within university curricula could enhance the social dimension of Islamic character education.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of Islamic character education theory by empirically validating a multidimensional construct consisting of spiritual, moral, social, intellectual, and normative dimensions. The use of Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrates that Islamic character education should be understood as a hierarchical and integrated construct rather than as isolated moral attributes. This finding enriches the academic discourse on Islamic education by providing empirical evidence that the formation of religious character among university students involves the interaction of intellectual engagement, moral values, spiritual practices, and social responsibility (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Ismet et al., 2025; Jamil, 2024). Consequently, this study strengthens the conceptual framework of Islamic character education in contemporary higher education.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide important implications for educational policy and program development in Islamic universities. Strengthening academic culture, encouraging student participation in religious and social activities, and integrating value-based learning within the curriculum can significantly enhance the development of Islamic character among students. Universities should also create educational environments that combine intellectual exploration with spiritual and moral development. Educational scholars argue that character development is most effective when academic learning is integrated with ethical reflection and community engagement (Mau, 2024). By promoting such integrative educational practices, Islamic higher education institutions can play a strategic role in producing graduates who not only possess strong intellectual competence but also demonstrate deeply internalized Islamic values in their personal and social lives.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Islamic Character Education among students of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) is formed through a multidimensional structure consisting of spiritual, moral and ethical, social, love for knowledge, and obedience and compliance dimensions. The results of the second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis demonstrate that all dimensions significantly contribute to the construction of Islamic character, with the love for knowledge dimension emerging as the most dominant factor. This finding provides an important insight that intellectual engagement and the motivation to seek knowledge play a central role in shaping Islamic character among university students. In the context of Islamic higher education, the integration of intellectual development, spiritual awareness, moral values, and social responsibility becomes a fundamental foundation for cultivating balanced individuals who possess both academic competence and strong religious character.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the development of Islamic character education theory by empirically validating a hierarchical, multidimensional construct using a second-order CFA approach within the PLS-SEM framework. The findings enrich the academic discourse on Islamic education by providing empirical evidence that the formation of Islamic character among university students is not limited to moral instruction but involves the integration of intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The data were collected from students within a specific institutional context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other higher education settings. In addition, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by respondents' subjective perceptions. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the participant pool across universities and regions, and to employ mixed-methods approaches that integrate quantitative and qualitative perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Islamic character formation in higher education contexts.

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