



HUMANIZATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: FENOMOLOGY STUDY OF INCLUSIVE LEARNING BASED ON ISLAMIC VALUES

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Abstract/Abstrak

Character education in elementary schools has tended to be understood as a process of normative and cognitive value instillation, so that the human aspects of students often receive little attention. This phenomenon is also found in educational practices in several elementary schools in Lumajang Regency, where character learning still focuses on obedience and formal behavioral achievements, while the needs for inclusiveness and a humanistic approach have not been fully internalized. This study aims to reveal the meaning and form of humanization of character education in the practice of inclusive learning based on Islamic values in elementary schools. The study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, involving elementary school teachers as the main subjects through in-depth interviews and learning observations. The results show that the humanization of character education is realized through empathetic pedagogical relationships, appreciation of student diversity, and the integration of Islamic values such as compassion, justice, and responsibility in daily learning practices. These findings expand on previous research that emphasized the normative aspects of character education, offering a phenomenological perspective on teachers' experiences in building inclusive and humanistic character education. This study concludes that a humanization approach based on Islamic values has the potential to strengthen character development and inclusive human development at the elementary school level.

Keywords: Character Education; Humanization of Education; Inclusive Learning; Islamic Values; Elementary School

Introduction

Character education has become one of the important agendas in developing the quality of education at the elementary school level. Globally, character education is seen not only as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as an effort to shape the values, attitudes, and moral behavior of students who are able to contribute positively

to society (Lickona, 2019; Berkowitz & Bier, 2022). However, various studies show that character education practices in many elementary schools still tend to be normative and cognitive, with a focus on compliance with rules and formal behavioral achievements, while the dimensions of humanity, empathy, and inclusiveness often receive less attention (Huda et al., 2021; Rahman & Nuryana, 2022). A similar phenomenon was also found in learning practices in several elementary schools in Lumajang Regency, where the implementation of character education did not fully take into account the diversity of students and a humanistic pedagogical approach.

In this context, inclusive education emerges as a strategic approach to accommodate diversity and build a learning environment that values each individual. Previous research emphasizes that inclusive education is not only related to physical access or administrative policies, but also to the attitudes and values applied in teacher-student interactions, such as fairness, empathy, and respect for differences (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020). However, most studies are still conceptual or focus on curriculum and policy, thus failing to explore teachers' real experiences in developing humanistic and inclusive character education. This research gap highlights the need for studies that place teachers' experiences as the main source of data to understand the meaning and practice of humanizing character education at the elementary school level.

In addition, in the tradition of Islamic education, Islamic values such as compassion, justice, patience, and brotherhood have great potential to be used as the foundation for humanizing character education. Previous studies have shown that integrating Islamic values into character education can strengthen the moral, spiritual, and social dimensions of students (Huda et al., 2021; Rahman & Nuryana, 2022). However, empirical studies emphasizing teachers' experiences in internalizing Islamic values concretely in inclusive learning practices are still very limited. This gap is the main basis for this study and what it offers, namely presenting a phenomenological perspective to understand teachers' experiences in developing humanistic and inclusive character education based on Islamic values.

Based on this background, this study has several important contributions. Theoretically, this study expands the literature on character education by emphasizing teachers' subjective experiences as a source of understanding the practice of humanizing character education. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, principals, and policymakers in designing and implementing inclusive learning that combines Islamic values, empathy, and respect for diversity.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to explore and understand the meaning, practices, and forms of humanization of character education in Islamic value-based inclusive learning in elementary schools, in accordance with the focus formulated in the abstract.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design, which is designed to deeply understand teachers' experiences in building humanized character education in elementary schools through inclusive learning based on Islamic values. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is able to explore the subjective meanings and life experiences of the research subjects

in the context of daily pedagogical practices, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods or normative conceptual research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). By using this approach, the study attempts to close the gap in previous literature, where most studies emphasize the normative framework of character education or the integration of Islamic values theoretically, without empirically exploring the experiences of teachers as the main actors in the practice of humanizing character education.

The research locations were selected from several elementary schools/madrasah ibtidaiyah in Lumajang Regency, East Java, which have implemented inclusive learning. The selection of these locations took into account the social, cultural, and religious diversity of the students, as well as character education practices that are still oriented towards obedience and formal behavioral achievements. This context provided an opportunity to explore how teachers present humanistic and Islamic values in real terms in their daily learning interactions.

The research data sources consisted of various informants who were directly involved in character education practices. The main informants included classroom teachers, Islamic education teachers, school principals, and several students who actively participated in inclusive learning. Informants were selected purposively, considering their experience in managing inclusive classes and their understanding of Islamic values applied in learning practices. In addition to primary data, this study also utilized secondary data in the form of school documents, such as learning tools, character education strengthening programs, and school policies related to inclusivity.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. In-depth interviews were used to explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of character education humanization, while participatory observation provided data on pedagogical interactions, learning strategies, and the application of Islamic values in teaching and learning activities. This approach allowed researchers to capture the daily reality in the classroom, while validating the information obtained through interviews. Documentary studies supported the findings, provided an overview of the institutional context, and confirmed the consistency between teachers' practices and school policies.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using a phenomenological approach, including data reduction, coding, theme grouping, and interpretation of the essential meanings of the research subjects' experiences. The analysis was conducted reflectively and iteratively to find patterns of meaning that represent the practice of humanizing character education based on Islamic values. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, member checking, and peer discussions to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This method specifically emphasizes the novelty of the research, namely the phenomenological exploration of teachers' experiences in practicing the humanization of character education with the integration of Islamic values in inclusive learning. Thus, this study not only fills conceptual and empirical gaps in the literature on character education and Islamic education, but also presents a new understanding of how character education can be internalized in a humanistic, contextual, and transformative manner at the elementary school level.

Results

1. Humanization of Character Education as a Relational Practice

The results of the study show that the humanization of character education in inclusive elementary schools is mainly realized through relational interactions between teachers and students. Teachers interpret character education as an effort to “humanize children,” that is, to treat each student with empathy and respect for differences, including students with special needs and those from diverse social backgrounds. Classroom teachers said that they always try to understand each child individually, paying attention to their needs, rather than simply assessing them based on their behavior or test results.

Classroom observations showed that this practice is reflected in the way teachers give all students the opportunity to participate actively, express their opinions, and ask questions without fear of being blamed. Teachers use supportive language, avoid negative labeling, and emphasize dialogue and understanding of students' mistakes. These findings are consistent with the principle of humanization of education that emphasizes subjectification, namely the process of becoming human through social relations and responsibilities (Biesta, 2019; Noddings, 2013).

2. Integration of Islamic Values in Inclusive Learning

Research data shows that Islamic values are the main foundation in the practice of humanizing character education. Values such as compassion, justice, patience, and brotherhood are not only taught verbally but also exemplified by teachers in their daily actions. For example, when conflicts arise between students, teachers encourage them to engage in dialogue, understand each other, and resolve problems based on Islamic principles, rather than simply imposing formal punishments.

School documentation, such as character-building programs and inclusive learning guidelines, reinforces these findings by demonstrating the integration of Islamic values into school policies and culture. Huda et al. (2021) and Rahman & Nuryana (2022) emphasize that the integration of Islamic values in character education enhances moral and social dimensions, and this study expands on these findings by demonstrating actual implementation in the classroom.

3. Students' Subjective Experiences in

Inclusive Learning From the students' perspective, humanistic and inclusive practices provide a sense of security and acceptance. Students feel more comfortable expressing their opinions and interacting with their peers without fear of criticism. One student said: "If we make a mistake, the teachers don't get angry right away. They teach us how to improve, and our friends are also guided to respect each other." Observations support this experience, with an increase in student participation in class discussions, group work, and social activities. An environment that emphasizes empathy, fairness, and cooperation allows students to not only learn academically, but also develop socially and emotionally. These findings show that the humanization of Islamic value-based character education not only shapes behavior, but also fosters moral awareness and prosocial skills in students.

Overall, the research results reveal that the humanization of character

education in inclusive elementary schools is realized through a combination of empathetic relational practices, the integration of Islamic values in daily interactions, and meaningful learning experiences for students. These findings confirm that humanistic character education can be an effective means of social transformation starting from the elementary education level.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the humanization of character education in inclusive elementary schools is primarily manifested through relational pedagogical practices based on Islamic values. Teachers position students as whole subjects, respect differences, and build empathetic interactions. These findings are in line with Biesta's (2019) view, which emphasizes subjectification in education, namely the process of shaping independent and moral individuals through responsible relationships. Thus, character education is not merely about instilling values or obedience, but also about shaping students' humanistic and inclusive life experiences.

Furthermore, this study confirms the importance of integrating Islamic values into inclusive learning. The values of compassion, justice, patience, and brotherhood serve as an ethical and pedagogical framework, guiding teacher-student interactions and conflict resolution in the classroom. This approach expands on previous findings that emphasized the normative aspects of character education or the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum (Huda et al., 2021; Rahman & Nuryana, 2022). This study shows that Islamic values can be internalized practically through teachers' daily actions, so that character learning is not only theoretical but also transformative.

From the perspective of students, humanistic and inclusive learning experiences have a significant impact on their sense of security, engagement, and social-emotional development. Students feel more accepted, dare to express themselves, and are able to work together with their peers in an environment that values diversity. This supports Noddings' (2013) theory of the ethic of care, which asserts that caring and empathetic relationships are the foundation for meaningful learning and character building.

Furthermore, the findings of this study show that the humanization of Islamic values-based character education has transformative potential in a broader social context. Learning practices that emphasize empathy, justice, and solidarity from elementary school can shape inclusive and civil citizens. Thus, humanistic character education not only impacts individuals but also strengthens social cohesion in multicultural societies (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ainscow, 2020).

The novelty of this study lies in the application of a phenomenological perspective to explore teachers' experiences in developing humanistic and inclusive character education. This approach closes the gap in previous research, which was mostly conceptual or normative, by emphasizing the real experiences of teachers as key actors in the practice of Islamic values-based character education. Thus, this study makes a significant empirical contribution to the literature on character education, inclusive education, and Islamic education, particularly in the context of elementary schools in Indonesia.

Overall, this discussion confirms that the humanization of Islamic values-

based character education is not merely a normative ideal, but a real practice that can be applied in the classroom to build meaningful, inclusive, and transformative learning experiences. These findings also emphasize the importance of positioning teachers as agents of change who are able to internalize ethical and Islamic values in every aspect of learning.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the humanization of character education in inclusive elementary schools is realized through relational, empathetic, and Islamic values-based pedagogical practices. Teachers position students as whole individuals, respect differences, and build interactions that support students' social, emotional, and moral development. The integration of Islamic values such as compassion, justice, patience, and brotherhood becomes the ethical foundation that guides daily learning practices, including conflict resolution, behavior habits, and character building. From the students' perspective, humanistic and inclusive learning provides a sense of security and acceptance, encourages active participation in the learning process, and shapes prosocial behavior from an early age.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. First, teachers and educational staff need to receive training and guidance in applying humanistic and inclusive learning strategies that internalize Islamic values in a practical and contextual manner. Second, schools are advised to develop a culture and policies that support the practice of humanizing character education, including mechanisms for reflection, teacher collaboration, and participatory student mentoring programs. Third, curriculum and learning tools should integrate Islamic values as an ethical and pedagogical foundation, not just as theoretical content.

The implications of this research are twofold, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research enriches the literature on character education, inclusive education, and Islamic education by emphasizing teachers' subjective experiences as a source of understanding of the practice of humanizing character. Practically, these findings can be a reference for elementary schools in Indonesia and in other multicultural contexts in designing humanistic, inclusive, and meaningful character learning, while supporting the development of a more inclusive and civilized society.

For further research, it is recommended to expand the scope of locations and informants, including involving parents and education supervisors, so that the perspective of humanizing character education can be analyzed more comprehensively. In addition, longitudinal research can be conducted to assess the long-term impact of Islamic values-based character education humanization practices on the moral and social development of students. With these steps, the research is expected to contribute more broadly to the development of humanistic and inclusive character education at the elementary school level and basic education globally.

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