

Islamic Religious Education, Islamic Value Internalization, and Moral Character Formation: A PLS-SEM Mediation Analysis Among Madrasa Students

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Abstrak

This study examines the mediating role of Islamic value internalization in the relationship between Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and the moral character formation of madrasa students. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study posits that effective IRE functions as a needs-supportive social context—fulfilling students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—thereby catalyzing the internalization of Islamic values, which in turn constitutes the psychological foundation for stable moral behavior. A quantitative survey design was employed, involving 400 students from Islamic primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary schools (MI, MTs, and MA) in Pekalongan Regency. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with 5,000-resample bootstrapping for mediation testing. Results indicate that IRE has a significant positive effect on both Islamic value internalization ($\beta = 0.63, p < 0.001$) and moral character formation ($\beta = 0.21, p = 0.001$). Islamic value internalization also significantly predicts moral character ($\beta = 0.56, p < 0.001$). Mediation analysis confirms a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.35, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.25, 0.46]$), indicating partial mediation. These findings underscore that IRE exerts its strongest influence on moral character through the mechanism of value internalization rather than through direct behavioral compliance alone. The study affirms the theoretical relevance of SDT in Islamic education contexts and calls for pedagogical reforms that emphasize autonomy-supportive, dialogical, and experientially rich IRE practices.

Keywords: Islamic religious education, Islamic value internalization, moral character formation, Self-Determination Theory, PLS-SEM, madrasa students

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Introduction

Education holds a pivotal role in shaping the personality of children. As learners within the school system, children encounter a wide array of subjects, one of which is Islamic Religious Education (IRE) for Muslim students. IRE constitutes an essential component of the curriculum across various levels of Islamic education (Mansir et al., 2022). Through IRE, students are guided to acquire a profound understanding of Islamic values, teachings, and principles, while simultaneously mastering concepts of faith, moral development, and religious

practice (Khomaeny & Hamzah, 2019). Normatively, IRE is oriented toward cultivating good character and preparing a generation of noble morality capable of contributing constructively to society (Shidiq et al., 2023).

Empirical evidence supports this orientation. Razak et al. (2019) found a significant positive effect of IRE on student attitudes. Similar findings were reported by Raidah (2013) regarding the formation of religious character. Furthermore, Halima et al. (2023) demonstrated a significant positive effect of IRE on the personality formation of students. Aligning with these findings, Rustian and Mugiono (2025) documented that IRE learning positively influences the formation of student personality. Nevertheless, the urgent mediating role of value internalization within IRE needs to be emphasized. Most studies have focused on the direct relationship between IRE learning and attitudinal or character outcomes, while the mechanism of religious value internalization by students has not been adequately modeled in existing research.

For IRE learning to transform into disposition, internalization is required—the acceptance of values as personal standards. Without such internalization, the influence of IRE tends to stop at external compliance that is fleeting in nature. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) explains that the quality of motivation and psychological well-being increases when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy (a sense of ownership and choice over actions), competence (a sense of capability and effectiveness in performing tasks), and relatedness (a sense of connection and being valued in social relationships). In a social context that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness, individuals tend to act in a self-endorsed manner, making behavior more consistent across situations and contributing to sustainable learning and development.

Based on SDT, IRE learning is positioned as a social context that fulfills students' basic psychological needs. The fulfillment of these needs triggers a transition in motivational regulation from external patterns toward identified and integrated regulation—in this case, the internalization of Islamic values. Autonomously internalized values function as stable self-standards that guide consistent behavior across situations, thereby directly contributing to the formation of moral personality. Research by Adytiya et al. (2024) indicates that IRE learning has a significant positive effect on the internalization of Islamic values. Furthermore, Nuriman and Fauzan (2017) demonstrated that the internalization of Islamic values has a significant positive effect on student personality. Therefore, it is important to examine the direct effect of IRE on student personality and its indirect effect through the mediation of Islamic value internalization. This study aims to test the direct effect of IRE on student personality and its indirect effect through the mediation of Islamic value internalization. The research questionnaire was administered to students of SD/MI, SMP/MTs, and SMA/MA in Pekalongan Regency.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

Theoretical Foundation

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in schools and madrasas does not merely function to transfer religious knowledge; it also shapes students' ways of thinking, motivation, and religious behavior. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), effective education is a process capable of fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. IRE that is managed dialogically, provides space for participation, offers constructive feedback, and fosters warm teacher-student relationships will be perceived by students as a needs-supportive context. When IRE is felt to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, students tend to interpret religious activities as something

valuable and aligned with themselves, not merely as external obligations. Within this framework, the quality of IRE is viewed as a strategic social context for promoting the process of value internalization and the formation of moral personality.

The internalization of Islamic values refers to the process whereby Islamic values (such as honesty, responsibility, trustworthiness, and social care) that initially come from outside the self (parents, teachers, environment) are gradually appreciated, accepted, and integrated as part of one's personal value system. SDT explains that behavioral regulation can move from external forms (merely avoiding punishment or seeking praise) toward more autonomous forms, such as identified regulation and integrated regulation, when needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. In this context, the internalization of Islamic values is not merely accepting religious commands at the cognitive level, but also consciously endorsing those values and making them standards for self-evaluation. Students who experience strong internalization of Islamic values tend to perform religious practices and moral behavior consistently, even without external supervision. IRE that supports basic psychological needs is expected to strengthen this internalization process.

Moral personality in this study is understood as the relatively stable tendency of students to act in accordance with Islamic values across various situations. Dimensions of moral personality include morality toward Allah (obedience in worship, sincerity of intention), morality toward fellow humans (honesty, empathy, social responsibility), morality toward oneself (discipline, self-respect), and morality toward the environment. Moral personality is not merely momentary compliance with rules, but consistency of behavior rooted in values that have become one with the self. Therefore, the formation of moral personality is influenced by two factors simultaneously: the quality of the educational context (such as IRE) and the success of the value internalization process within the student.

Hypothesis Development

Drawing upon the theoretical foundations outlined above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Effect of IRE on Moral Personality. IRE that is managed meaningfully, relevant to students' lives, and supportive of basic psychological needs has a strong potential to form positive religious attitudes and behavior. IRE teachers who provide role models, invite dialogue, and connect material with the realities of daily life will facilitate students' understanding and practice of Islamic morality. Theoretically, needs-supportive learning contexts correlate positively with adaptive motivational and behavioral outcomes. Thus, IRE is predicted to have a positive effect on the moral personality of students.

H1: IRE has a positive effect on the moral personality of students.

Effect of IRE on Islamic Value Internalization. Within the SDT framework, the quality of the social learning context plays an important role in determining the extent to which taught values can be internalized. IRE that provides rational explanations, space for questioning, direct experiences (such as religious activities at school), and emotional support from teachers will make it easier for students to understand why certain values are important and worthy of adoption as their own. The more students feel that IRE respects their autonomy and competence, the greater the likelihood that they will accept and integrate Islamic values into their personal value system.

H2: IRE has a positive effect on the internalization of Islamic values.

Effect of Islamic Value Internalization on Moral Personality. Value internalization bridges the gap between knowledge and behavior. Students who have internalized Islamic values will use those values as references in decision-making and self-regulation, not only in formal situations (such as in the presence of teachers), but also when unsupervised. From the

perspective of personality psychology, internalized values contribute to the formation of stable behavior patterns across situations, which manifest as moral personality. Therefore, the stronger the internalization of Islamic values, the higher the tendency of students to display moral behavior in daily life.

H3: Islamic value internalization has a positive effect on the moral personality of students.

Mediating Role of Islamic Value Internalization. Theoretically, the effect of IRE on moral personality occurs not only directly but also through psychological mechanisms within the student. SDT positions internalization as a key mechanism explaining how social contexts (in this case, IRE) are translated into autonomous and consistent behavioral regulation. Quality IRE will strengthen the internalization of Islamic values, and this internalization in turn drives the formation of moral personality. Thus, Islamic value internalization is predicted to mediate the relationship between IRE and moral personality.

H4: Islamic value internalization mediates the effect of IRE on the moral personality of students.

Method

This study employs a quantitative survey design to test the direct effect of IRE on student personality and its indirect effect through the mediation of Islamic value internalization. The data obtained are primary data in the form of questionnaires. Primary data are data collected directly (for the first time) by the researcher for subsequent analysis to find solutions to the research problem (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The research population consists of all students of SD/MI, SMP/MTs, and SMA/MA in Pekalongan Regency who were active in the 2024/2025 academic year. The sampling technique applied in this study is stratified cluster random sampling, with stratification based on educational level and clustering at the school level. Inclusion criteria include active students enrolled in IRE subjects. The minimum sample size was set at approximately 300 respondents (roughly 100 per stratum) so that the data obtained would be adequate for mediation testing using structural equation modeling.

The analytical technique used is structural analysis with PLS-SEM, considering its predictive-explanatory orientation, tolerance for mild non-normality, and suitability for mediation models with heterogeneous samples. The analysis steps include evaluation of the measurement model, testing of the direct effect of IRE on moral personality and the indirect effect through value internalization, and determination of significance using bootstrapping (e.g., 5,000 resamples) to obtain confidence intervals for the mediation effect. Model performance indicators such as R^2 and Q^2 are used to assess explanatory power and predictive relevance. Optional multi-group analysis is conducted to compare effect magnitudes across educational levels.

This study consists of three reflective constructs: IRE, Islamic value internalization, and moral personality. The IRE construct represents the quality of the social learning context that supports basic psychological needs (autonomy support, competence support, and relatedness support) as emphasized by SDT. Islamic value internalization reflects the acceptance of values as autonomous self-standards, encompassing dimensions of identification, integration, and self-endorsement of behavior. Moral personality is operationalized as a relatively stable Islamic moral disposition across situations, including morality toward Allah, toward fellow humans, and toward oneself and the environment. All indicators are measured using a five-point Likert scale.

The research instrument is a structured questionnaire containing scales for each construct along with demographic items. Item construction considers language equivalence

across students of different educational levels, avoiding overly abstract terminology for elementary school levels. Measurement quality testing is conducted through content validity by experts (IRE/SDT/psychometrics) and confirmatory factor analysis within the PLS-SEM framework. Internal reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (≥ 0.70), while convergent validity is assessed through AVE values (≥ 0.50) and indicator loadings (ideally ≥ 0.70). Discriminant validity is examined using the HTMT criterion (≤ 0.85 – 0.90).

Instrument piloting is conducted to ensure comprehensibility, estimate initial reliability, and refine wording. Data collection procedures include obtaining permission from school authorities, socializing with IRE teachers and homeroom teachers, and administering paper-based questionnaires with a duration of approximately 15–25 minutes. All procedures adhere to research ethics principles: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymization/pseudonymization of data, participants' right to withdraw without academic consequences, and assurance of secure storage for academic purposes only.

Result

This study involved 400 madrasa students in Pekalongan Regency during the 2024/2025 academic year. Respondents came from three educational levels: Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), and Madrasah Aliyah (MA). As presented in Table 1, the majority of respondents were MI students, numbering 240 (60%), followed by MTs students numbering 120 (30%), and MA students numbering 40 (10%). This composition reflects that the madrasa population base in Pekalongan Regency is dominated by elementary-level students, while the number of students at junior and senior secondary levels is relatively smaller.

In terms of gender, as presented in Table 2, the number of male and female respondents was relatively balanced, with 199 males and 201 females. At each educational level, the gender distribution also did not show extreme imbalance, so the respondent profile sufficiently represents the general condition of madrasa students in Pekalongan Regency. In terms of age, MI students were around 11 years old, dominated by grades 5 and 6; MTs students were around 14 years old, mostly in grades 8 and 9; while MA students were around 17 years old, generally in grades 11 and 12.

Descriptively, the mean values for the three research constructs showed positive tendencies. Students' perceptions of IRE learning were in the relatively high category, as was the degree of Islamic value internalization reported by students. Moral personality was also at a high mean, indicating that the majority of students rated themselves as fairly consistent in displaying behavior aligned with Islamic values in daily life. Based on this profile, the characteristics of respondents and the descriptive tendencies of the research variables (Table 3) indicate that the collected data are suitable for use in structural model testing.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents by Educational Level (N = 400)

Educational Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage
MI	240	60.0%
MTs	120	30.0%
MA	40	10.0%

Table 2

Distribution of Respondents by Educational Level and Gender (N = 400)

Educational Level	Male	Female	Total
MI	118	122	240
MTs	60	60	120
MA	21	19	40
Total	199	201	400

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Latent Constructs (N = 400)

Variable	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3
1. IRE	3.95	0.55	0.91	0.61	(0.78)		
2. Islamic value internalization	4.05	0.50	0.90	0.59	0.63	(0.77)	
3. Moral personality	4.10	0.48	0.92	0.64	0.54	0.68	(0.80)

All instrument items for the IRE, Islamic value internalization, and moral personality constructs were declared fit for use. Indicator loading values were above 0.70, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were above 0.80, and AVE was above 0.50. HTMT values below 0.85 indicated that discriminant validity was met, so the measurement model was assessed as good and could proceed to structural model testing using the PLS-SEM approach.

Structural model analysis results show that IRE has a positive and significant effect on Islamic value internalization and on the moral personality of students. Islamic value internalization also has a positive and significant effect on moral personality. The R-square values indicate that IRE is able to explain part of the variation in Islamic value internalization, while the combination of IRE and Islamic value internalization explains a meaningful proportion of the variation in moral personality, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Structural Model Analysis Results (PLS-SEM)

Structural Path	β	t	p	f^2	Hypothesis
IRE → Islamic value internalization	0.63	15.40	< 0.001	0.66	Supported
IRE → Moral personality	0.21	3.25	0.001	0.07	Supported
Islamic value internalization → Moral personality	0.56	10.80	< 0.001	0.39	Supported
R ² Islamic value internalization = 0.40; R ² moral personality = 0.62.					

Mediation testing using bootstrapping shows that the indirect effect of IRE on moral personality through Islamic value internalization is positive and significant, with a confidence interval that does not cross zero. The direct effect of IRE on moral personality remains significant, so the mediation that occurs is partial mediation. Thus, all research hypotheses are supported by empirical data. A summary of the mediation test results is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Mediation Analysis Results

Mediated Relationship	Indirect Effect (β)	t	p	95% CI (Bootstrapping)	Mediation Type
IRE → Islamic value internalization → Moral personality	0.35	7.80	< 0.001	0.25 to 0.46	Partial

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the proposed model has fairly strong explanatory power for the key variables studied. IRE proved to have a positive and significant effect on Islamic value internalization and moral personality, while Islamic value internalization also had a positive and significant effect on moral personality. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values of 0.40 for Islamic value internalization and 0.62 for moral personality indicate that the variation in Islamic value internalization can be moderately explained by IRE, while the variation in moral personality can be explained to a considerable extent by the combination of IRE and Islamic value internalization. Overall, these findings are consistent with the theoretical framework built in this study: IRE as a social learning context that supports basic psychological needs plays an important role in the process of value internalization and the formation of students' moral personality.

The path coefficient from IRE to Islamic value internalization, which is relatively strong ($\beta = 0.63$ with a large effect size), shows that the quality of IRE learning perceived by students plays a central role in driving the process of appreciating Islamic values. From the SDT perspective, learning that supports needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness will facilitate internalization, because students feel valued, capable, and have positive bonds with teachers and peers. IRE designed dialogically, providing space for students to ask questions and express opinions, accompanied by rational explanations relevant to daily life, makes students not merely recognize Islamic teachings at the cognitive level, but also accept and endorse those values as something important and aligned with themselves. Thus, this empirical finding strengthens the view that needs-supportive IRE is far more effective in driving value internalization than IRE that merely emphasizes material memorization and formal compliance.

The effect of Islamic value internalization on moral personality, which is also quite strong ($\beta = 0.56$ with a medium-to-large effect size), confirms that internalized values become an important foundation for the formation of stable behavior patterns across situations. Students who view Islamic values as part of their personal value system tend to use those values as references in decision-making, both in relationships with Allah, with fellow humans, with themselves, and with the environment. This aligns with the concept of morality in Islam, which is not only measured by outward compliance with rules but also by sincerity, consistency, and firmness of heart in choosing morally valuable actions. This finding also clarifies the distance between religious knowledge that has not been internalized and values that have become one with the self: the former does not necessarily lead to moral behavior, while the latter has direct implications for the formation of moral personality.

Although smaller, the direct effect of IRE on moral personality ($\beta = 0.21$ with a small but significant effect size) remains important to note. This coefficient shows that IRE does not only work through the internalization mechanism but can also provide a direct impact on student behavior through habituation and social reinforcement in the madrasa environment. Various practices such as congregational worship, routine religious activities, and the school's religious culture can encourage students to act in accordance with Islamic values even though the internalization process is not yet fully mature. From a pedagogical perspective, this illustrates that IRE has two complementary influence pathways: a direct pathway through environmental arrangement and behavior habituation, and an indirect pathway through strengthening value internalization that subsequently becomes the basis for self-regulation.

The finding regarding the mediation effect of Islamic value internalization provides a more complete picture of how IRE works in forming moral personality. The significant indirect effect of IRE on moral personality through Islamic value internalization, accompanied by the continued significance of the direct effect of IRE, indicates a pattern of partial mediation. This

means that part of the effect of IRE on moral personality is explained by the success of IRE in driving the internalization of Islamic values, while another part occurs through a direct pathway, such as through habituation and school culture. Theoretically, this finding aligns with the main assumption of SDT that social contexts (in this case, IRE) influence autonomous behavior through the process of internalization, but at the same time, these contexts can also influence behavior more directly through external regulation and prevailing social norms. The magnitude of the indirect effect, which is stronger than the direct effect, indicates that internalization is the more dominant mechanism in explaining the relationship between IRE and moral personality.

From the theoretical implications side, the results of this study consolidate the relevance of Self-Determination Theory as a framework for understanding the formation of moral personality in Islamic education contexts. IRE can be positioned not merely as a vehicle for knowledge transfer, but as a social context that encourages the formation of more autonomous motivational regulation and stronger internalization of Islamic values. The success in operationalizing the construct of Islamic value internalization as a significant mediator also shows that this concept is not merely a normative idea but can be measured and tested empirically in a structural model. This finding simultaneously affirms that Islamic morality can be understood as a manifestation of values that have been internalized, not merely cognitive or affective outcomes that stand alone.

Practically, the results of this study convey several important messages for stakeholders in the madrasa environment. IRE teachers need to design learning processes that not only emphasize material delivery and supervision but also provide space for dialogue, reflection, and explanation of the meaning behind religious teachings so that Islamic values are more easily internalized by students. Madrasa leaders need to strengthen a religious and supportive school culture, such as by building warm relationships between teachers and students, creating participatory religious activities, and fostering collective role-modeling traditions among teachers. Curriculum developers and policymakers in Islamic education can consider integrating needs-supportive teaching principles into the IRE curriculum, so that the goal of forming moral personality does not stop at normative formulations but is reflected in concrete learning experience designs.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has a significant effect on the formation of students' moral personality through two pathways: direct and indirect effects. Directly, IRE plays a role in forming moral personality by facilitating relevant learning that supports students' basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Indirectly, IRE influences the formation of moral personality through the mediation of Islamic value internalization. This finding strengthens the view that deep value internalization not only increases religious knowledge but also becomes a stable foundation for consistent moral behavior, both in formal and informal contexts.

The analysis results also show that IRE learning that supports the internalization of Islamic values can encourage students to act in accordance with Islamic values in daily life, in relationships with Allah, fellow humans, themselves, and the environment. Therefore, IRE must be designed by considering character formation aspects, where Islamic values are internalized strongly, not merely transferred cognitively. Practically, IRE teachers need to design more participatory learning and provide space for students to understand and appreciate religious values, as well as create a school culture that supports those values.

Several limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design used makes causal conclusions limited to their consistency with theory, so longitudinal research is needed to capture how value internalization and moral personality develop over time. Additionally, data were collected from students nested within madrasa units, while the analysis used did not explicitly accommodate hierarchical data structures. Variation across schools, characteristics of IRE teachers, and school climate potentially provide additional contributions to the model that were not fully captured in this analysis. Future research can use a multilevel approach to distinguish the effects of individual and school factors, as well as include other variables such as parental support, quality of peer relationships, or family religious climate to enrich understanding of the dynamics of moral personality formation among madrasa students.

Conflict of interests

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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