



Character Education Based on Islamic Local Wisdom: A Case Study of Aswaja Value Internalization in a Madrasah Aliyah

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Abstract: This study explores the internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) values in character formation at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian, Pandan Indah Village. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Findings reveal that Aswaja values—such as moderation (tawasuth), tolerance (tasamuh), balance (tawazun), and social responsibility (amar ma'ruf nahi munkar)—are systematically embedded in curricular activities, school culture, and daily student interactions. These values are integrated not only in religious subjects but also across general lessons, extracurricular religious rituals, and peer interactions. Key challenges include limited teacher training, insufficient contextual teaching resources, and external influences from digital media. Nevertheless, strong community engagement, exemplary leadership from teachers, and active student participation enhance the internalization process. The study highlights the significance of character education rooted in Islamic local wisdom as a strategic response to the moral challenges faced by youth in the digital age.

Keyword: Aswaja, value internalization, character education, madrasah, Islamic education

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji proses internalisasi nilai-nilai Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) dalam pembentukan karakter peserta didik di Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian, Desa Pandan Indah. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai Aswaja seperti tawasuth (moderat), tasamuh (toleransi), tawazun (keseimbangan), dan amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (kepedulian sosial) terinternalisasi secara sistematis dalam kegiatan kurikuler, kokurikuler, dan budaya madrasah. Nilai-nilai tersebut diajarkan tidak hanya dalam pelajaran agama, tetapi juga diintegrasikan dalam mata pelajaran umum, kegiatan keagamaan, serta interaksi sosial sehari-hari. Tantangan utama dalam proses ini adalah keterbatasan pelatihan guru, kurangnya sumber ajar kontekstual, dan pengaruh nilai luar melalui media sosial. Meski demikian, dukungan dari komunitas, keteladanan guru, dan keterlibatan aktif siswa memperkuat efektivitas proses internalisasi. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya model pendidikan karakter berbasis kearifan lokal Islam sebagai respons terhadap tantangan moral generasi muda di era digital.

Kata kunci: Aswaja, internalisasi nilai, pendidikan karakter, madrasah, pendidikan Islam

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Introduction

In recent years, the importance of character education has been emphasized globally due to the rising challenges posed by globalization, digitalization, and moral relativism (Hasan & Aziz, 2023). In Indonesia, these dynamics are particularly significant given the country's rich multicultural and religious landscape. The government's national character education policy aims to reinforce core values such as integrity, respect, responsibility, and tolerance (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021; Hasan et al., 2024). However, a critical issue remains: how can these universal values be contextualized within the framework of Islamic education, specifically through the lens of Aswaja, which has been foundational to many Islamic institutions across the archipelago.

Aswaja, or Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah, is not only a theological orientation but also a cultural and moral compass that reflects the moderate, inclusive, and pluralistic nature of Indonesian Islam (Aryani et al., 2024). Its emphasis on balance (*tawazun*), moderation (*tawassuth*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and proactive moral action (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*) provides a rich conceptual basis for addressing modern ethical dilemmas (Muhaimin & Musnandar, 2021; Hasan, 2024). Moreover, these principles are deeply embedded in the *pesantren* tradition and Islamic educational institutions such as *madrasahs*, which historically have served not only as centers of learning but also as moral communities.

The need for a values-based educational approach that draws from indigenous Islamic wisdom is more urgent than ever. A growing number of studies have highlighted the disconnect between students' moral understanding and their actual behavior, especially in the digital era, where information is abundant but moral discernment is lacking (Rahmatullah, 2022; Hidayat & Zaini, 2023). Thus, integrating Aswaja values systematically into character education is not merely a cultural necessity but an educational imperative.

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws upon the convergence of virtue ethics and culturally responsive pedagogy. Virtue ethics, as proposed by Aristotle and developed in modern educational theory, emphasizes the cultivation of moral character through habitual practice and guided reflection (Kristjánsson, 2020). Culturally responsive pedagogy, on the other hand, posits that effective education must be anchored in the cultural context of learners (Gay, 2018). The Aswaja-based character education model aligns with both frameworks by promoting virtues through religious-cultural practices familiar to Indonesian Muslim youth.

In addition to the theoretical gap, there is also a methodological void in how the internalization of Aswaja values is studied within real-world educational settings. While some institutions have begun integrating these values through curriculum revisions and co-curricular programs, limited empirical data is evaluating the effectiveness of such initiatives (Wankel & Wankel, 2016). For example, Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian in Pandan Indah Village has explicitly adopted Aswaja principles in its pedagogical strategies. Still, no systematic research has yet examined how these values are internalized by students or how they influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and moral decision-making processes.

Moreover, while state-led character education often relies on abstract principles or civic virtues, Islamic institutions tend to integrate values through daily routines, religious rituals, and mentorship by religious leaders. This embeddedness of values through informal and formal education channels is a distinctive feature that deserves scholarly attention. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms by which Aswaja values are internalized—whether through narrative storytelling (*qashash*), modeling (*uswah hasanah*), or structured learning activities—is essential for developing a replicable model of character education grounded in local religious wisdom.

Another key concern is the relevance of these values in countering the influence of radical ideologies and moral nihilism. Studies have shown that young people who lack a strong moral foundation are more susceptible to extremist narratives, especially when they feel alienated from mainstream cultural and religious frameworks (Nasir et al., 2022). Aswaja's emphasis on moderation and balance offers a resilient framework against such tendencies, fostering an inclusive yet principled moral identity among youth.

This research is also informed by interdisciplinary insights from moral psychology, educational sociology, and Islamic pedagogy. Integrating these perspectives allows for a more holistic understanding of character development as a dynamic interplay between personal beliefs, institutional structures, and broader socio-religious contexts.

To address these issues, this study proposes a qualitative case study approach that explores the lived experiences of teachers and students at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian. Data will be collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to capture how Aswaja values are taught, practiced, and internalized within the school environment. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to bridge the gap between traditional Islamic values and modern educational needs, offering a framework that is both theologically sound and pedagogically effective. The findings are expected to inform policy and practice in

Islamic educational institutions, particularly those seeking to develop holistic character education programs rooted in indigenous religious traditions.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to investigate the internalization of Aswaja values in character education at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian in Pandan Indah Village. A case study method enables an in-depth exploration of contextual and processual elements of educational practice, particularly in bounded systems such as schools (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The site was chosen through purposive sampling due to its longstanding and explicit commitment to integrating Aswaja principles into its institutional culture. Participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, including school administrators, Islamic studies teachers, and students involved in religious or leadership activities. The inclusion criteria were a minimum of two years of teaching or learning experience at the madrasah and direct involvement in programs related to character formation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data were collected using three primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Sugiyono, 2017). Interviews were conducted with 12 participants, comprising the head of the madrasah, five teachers, and six students. These interviews explored participants' experiences, strategies, and perceptions related to the implementation of Aswaja values. Observations were carried out over one month to gain insights into the daily practices and interactions that reflect character education, particularly during teaching sessions, religious assemblies, and school rituals. In addition, institutional documents such as curricula, lesson plans, and student behavior guidelines were reviewed to understand the formal articulation of Aswaja-based character education. Triangulating these three data sources enhances the depth and credibility of findings (Tracy, 2020).

Data analysis followed the principles of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun & Clarke, (2022). The researcher manually transcribed and reviewed all data to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes that aligned with the research objectives. These themes were then refined through constant comparison between interviews, observations, and documents. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several validation techniques were employed, including triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. The researcher also engaged in reflective journaling to identify and mitigate potential biases. Thick description and prolonged engagement in the field further enhanced the credibility and transferability of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Results And Discussions

Results

The process of internalizing Aswaja values at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian demonstrates a holistic educational approach that integrates doctrinal teachings with contextual applications in students' daily lives. Data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis reveal structured and multidimensional efforts to instill Aswaja values both institutionally and culturally. The integration of Aswaja values into the curriculum is not merely declarative but operationalized through instructional design, co-curricular activities, and community-based religious practices. Document analysis shows that lesson plans and syllabi consistently include learning objectives related to tolerance, honesty, and respect—core principles of Aswaja. The alignment between written curriculum and instructional practices is reinforced by classroom observations, where teachers regularly refer to moral values during content delivery, even in non-religious subjects. As expressed by the Foundation Chairman, Mr. Kamaruddin, M.Pd: *"We are committed to instilling Aswaja values not only through religious subjects but also integrating them into all aspects of learning and madrasah life. This is not just a slogan but becomes the operational foundation for all academic and non-academic activities in our madrasah."* The Madrasah Principal, Mr. Syafii, S.Pd, added: *"The internalization of Aswaja values is not only the responsibility of religious teachers but of all educators. We encourage every teacher to contextualize these values in their respective subjects so that students can see the relevance of Aswaja's teachings in various dimensions of life."* Observations in several mathematics and science lessons confirm these statements, where teachers integrate discussions about justice and equality into problem-solving tasks. For example, in grade XI mathematics learning, the teacher used examples of zakat distribution to explain the concepts of percentage and proportionality, while emphasizing the value of social justice from an Aswaja perspective.

Extracurricular programs serve as significant complementary tools in the internationalization process. Documentation of program schedules and student participation records reveals that structured religious gatherings such as tahlilan and istighotsah are conducted regularly. Observational data from these activities indicate that students are not merely passive participants but also take leadership roles in organizing and conducting rituals. One twelfth-grade student, Ahmad Fauzi, stated: *"Through monthly istighotsah activities, we not only learn prayers and wirids but also values such as sincerity, patience, and humility. As a committee member, I also learn about responsibility and cooperation, which reflect Aswaja values in real action."* Observations at the monthly istighotsah event showed students demonstrating respect and initiative, indicating that the rituals are not mere formalities but are

internalized as part of their identity. The extracurricular advisor, Ustadz Mahfudz, explained: *"We deliberately give responsibilities to students in religious activities to foster a sense of ownership towards Aswaja traditions. When they actively participate, these values will be more easily internalized compared to if they were only taught theoretically in class."*

Triangulated findings also indicate that peer interactions and school culture significantly support value reinforcement. In observed group discussions in the aqidah-akhlak class, students were encouraged to relate ethical dilemmas to Aswaja principles, followed by structured feedback sessions from their peers. One example included group discussions about online behavior, where students debated the ethics of social media interactions using the perspective of Aswaja's teachings. Siti Aisyah, an eleventh-grade student, expressed: *"The discussion about social media ethics made me more reflective in posting or commenting online. I always ask myself: 'Does this reflect the adab and akhlak of Aswaja that I've learned?' This helps me become a more responsible social media user."* These observations strengthen student interview responses stating that they have become more reflective and socially responsible. The guidance counselor, Mrs. Fatimah, S.Pd, added: *"We see significant changes in student behavior when Aswaja values are articulated and practiced in the context of their real lives, especially in social interactions and technology use. The peer education approach is very effective because students tend to be more responsive to peer influence."*

In terms of community involvement, document analysis confirms that the madrasah maintains active collaboration with local religious figures and parents. Invitation letters, attendance records, and event agendas all indicate consistent engagement with stakeholders. Observations during public religious events, such as community study circles, show high participation from parents and the community, supporting the claim that value internalization extends beyond the school environment. As expressed by Mr. Ahmad, a community leader: *"Collaboration between the madrasah and the community is essential in strengthening Aswaja values. When students see consistency between what is taught in the madrasah and what is practiced in the community, the process of value internalization becomes more effective and sustainable."* Interviews with parents further validate this by noting changes in student behavior at home, such as increased discipline and respect for elders, consistent with Aswaja teachings. Mrs. Aminah, a parent of a tenth-grade student, stated: *"I see positive changes in my child's attitude at home. He has become more respectful to parents, more disciplined in worship, and often relates his behavior to the values learned in the madrasah. This shows that Aswaja-based character education in the madrasah truly impacts daily life."*

Nevertheless, the research findings also reveal inhibiting factors that need critical attention. The lack of systematic teacher training in Aswaja pedagogy, although acknowledged in interviews, was also evident in the inconsistent use of reflective teaching methods across classrooms. Mr. Abdurrahman, S.Pd, expressed

his concern: "As teachers, we need specialized training on effective teaching methodologies for internalizing Aswaja values. Currently, many of us rely on intuition and personal experience, rather than structured, evidence-based pedagogical approaches." Observations show that while some teachers effectively use dialogic and contextual techniques, others heavily rely on rote learning. Additionally, analysis of teacher portfolios and training records confirms the absence of recent professional development related to Aswaja integration, reinforcing interview data about capacity development needs. Documentation and interviews also reveal limited access to updated and standardized textbooks on Aswaja values. Mr. Mahmud, a Kemuhammadiyah teacher, explained: "The limitation of comprehensive and contextual learning resources about Aswaja is a challenge in the learning process. We often have to adapt or even create our learning materials, which certainly affects the quality and consistency of content delivery." Many teachers rely on locally produced or adapted materials, which vary in quality and comprehensiveness. This gap in resources impacts instructional quality and student understanding, as seen in observed classes where some students struggled to articulate core concepts beyond memorized definitions.

Another critical finding, drawn from student interviews and confirmed by observations of peer dynamics and digital behavior, is the influence of social media and external cultural content. Siti Aisyah, an eleventh-grade student, revealed the dilemma she faces: "Sometimes I feel confused between the values taught in the madrasah and what I see on social media. Some online content contradicts the Aswaja principles we learn, but is very popular among peers." While some students successfully internalize Aswaja values, others face cognitive dissonance between what is taught at school and the values promoted through digital platforms. Observations of digital literacy workshops revealed inconsistent levels of critical engagement among students. This emphasizes the importance of integrating digital ethics into the Aswaja-based character education model.

Discussions

The internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) values at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian in Pandan Indah Village is a deliberate and structured effort aimed at shaping students' character following Islamic principles rooted in moderation, tolerance, and love for tradition. This process integrates religious values across academic content, school culture, and students' involvement in the broader community. As emphasized by contemporary scholars, the success of value-based education depends on the alignment between curriculum content, the learning environment, and learners' social context (Zubaedi, 2021; Hasan & Azizah, 2022). This approach is evident in the educational model adopted by the madrasah, where religious and ethical dimensions are seamlessly incorporated into everyday learning experiences.

In academic subjects such as mathematics, teachers emphasize ethical behavior alongside cognitive competence. For example, when solving problems or working on group tasks, students are reminded of values like honesty, fairness, and responsibility. These values are not merely theoretical but practiced through day-to-day classroom interactions, thereby reinforcing Aswaja principles such as *tawazun* (balance) and *amanah* (trustworthiness). This strategy aligns with the principles of character education that encourage students to internalize values through contextual and meaningful experiences (Mulyasa, 2022). As a result, students develop not only academic skills but also a moral compass that guides their behavior both within and outside the classroom.

Religious activities also play a crucial role in this internalization process. Regularly held programs such as collective prayers, Qur'anic recitations, and Islamic study sessions serve not only as spiritual practices but also as educational tools for value formation. These activities involve both students and the local community, creating an environment where values are continuously modeled and reinforced. The active participation of the surrounding society reflects the ecological approach to education, which highlights the importance of environmental and cultural contexts in shaping individual development (Santrock, 2023). Through this interaction, students witness firsthand how religious values are embodied in community practices, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity and collective responsibility.

The strong commitment of the educational institution, especially from teachers and school leaders, further supports the success of this internationalization process. Educators at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian serve as role models who consistently exhibit the values they teach. Their dedication is reflected in the way they plan lessons, interact with students, and engage in school-wide activities. This modeling is crucial in character formation, as students tend to emulate behaviors demonstrated by figures they respect and trust. Research in educational psychology confirms that the behavior of teachers significantly influences students' moral development (Lickona, 2019; Umam & Hasan, 2025). Therefore, the consistent embodiment of Aswaja values by educators enhances the credibility and impact of the internalization process.

Students are also actively engaged in community service activities, which function as experiential learning platforms. These experiences allow students to apply religious values in real-world settings, thereby deepening their understanding and commitment. For instance, participating in local clean-up initiatives or assisting during religious events helps students internalize the principles of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). These activities embody Kolb's experiential learning theory, which asserts that knowledge is constructed through

concrete experiences, reflection, and active experimentation (Yuliana, 2022; Rofiq et al., 2025). Through such engagements, students develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of civic duty – all of which are aligned with the Aswaja worldview.

Despite these successes, the internalization process is not without challenges. One significant barrier is the diverse background of students, who come from various family environments and levels of religious exposure. Some students may be unfamiliar with or even skeptical toward certain traditions emphasized at the madrasah, such as tahlilan or manaqiban. This diversity, while enriching, can create discrepancies in value acceptance and understanding. Educators must therefore employ inclusive pedagogical strategies that respect different perspectives while gradually introducing core Aswaja values. Adaptive teaching approaches and differentiated instruction can be used to bridge gaps in students' prior knowledge and experiences (Hasan & Mujahidin, 2023).

Another limiting factor is the lack of adequate instructional resources specifically focused on Aswaja-based education. Teachers often rely on general Islamic textbooks that do not address the unique perspectives of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah an-Nahdliyah. To overcome this, educators are encouraged to collaborate in developing context-specific teaching materials that reflect both doctrinal and cultural elements of Aswaja thought. The availability of tailored textbooks, digital resources, and audiovisual content would greatly enhance the effectiveness of value internalization. Support from school administrators in organizing training sessions and providing development grants is essential in this regard (Nugroho, 2021).

Moreover, the growing influence of social media and global digital culture presents another significant challenge. Students today are exposed to a wide range of values and ideologies through online platforms, many of which conflict with the principles of moderation, community, and tradition upheld by Aswaja. This exposure can lead to confusion, identity conflict, and even the adoption of individualistic or radical attitudes. To mitigate this risk, the madrasah needs to incorporate digital literacy education that enables students to critically evaluate online content. Discussion forums, media analysis activities, and guided reflection sessions can help students become more discerning and resilient in navigating the digital world (Rahmatullah, (2022b). Such efforts are crucial to safeguarding the internalization of Aswaja values from external influences that could undermine them.

Despite these obstacles, the core values being internalized – tawasuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (social responsibility), and hubbul wathan minal iman (patriotism) – continue to guide educational practices at the madrasah. These values are not only taught explicitly in religious education classes but are also embedded in broader curricular

and extracurricular activities. For example, discussions on national identity and civic responsibility are included in social studies lessons, where students learn to appreciate Indonesia's pluralism while upholding their religious identity. Such integration ensures that students develop a holistic worldview that balances faith, knowledge, and civic engagement.

In essence, the internalization of Aswaja values at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian represents a comprehensive and context-sensitive educational model. By combining academic instruction, religious practice, community engagement, and reflective learning, the madrasah fosters the development of individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also morally grounded and socially aware. This approach aligns with the broader aims of Islamic education in Indonesia, which seeks to produce a generation that is faithful, knowledgeable, and committed to the well-being of their society. As schools across the country continue to face moral and ideological challenges, the experience of Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian offers valuable insights into how traditional Islamic values can be meaningfully integrated into modern educational contexts.

Sustaining this internalization process requires ongoing collaboration among all stakeholders, including educators, school administrators, parents, and community leaders. Each party plays a vital role in creating a consistent and supportive environment for value formation. Schools must continue to innovate, adapt, and reflect on their practices to ensure that religious values remain relevant and impactful in the lives of their students. By doing so, institutions like Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian can contribute to the formation of a peaceful, tolerant, and morally resilient society.

Conclusion

The internalization of Aswaja (Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah) values at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian is implemented through a comprehensive and structured strategy that integrates curricular content, religious practices, and social activities. This holistic approach ensures that value education is not limited to theoretical instruction but extends to real-life experiences that shape students' behavior and worldview. The integration of Aswaja values—such as moderation, tolerance, balance, and love for tradition—into various aspects of school life demonstrates the madrasa's commitment to forming students with strong character rooted in Islamic teachings.

The success of this internalization process is supported by several key factors, including the commitment of educational stakeholders, an active and religiously observant community, and the alignment between formal and non-formal educational activities. Nonetheless, challenges persist, particularly in the areas of

teacher professional development, availability of contextual learning resources, and the influence of external digital cultures. Addressing these obstacles requires strategic efforts such as capacity building for educators, enhanced community collaboration, and the incorporation of media literacy education to foster critical thinking among students.

Overall, the internalization of Aswaja values at Madrasah Aliyah Ta'limuasyibian contributes significantly to adolescent character formation. By embedding these values into students' academic and social experiences, the madrasa fosters the development of individuals who are intellectually competent, morally grounded, and socially responsible. In the long term, this process not only strengthens the identity of students as part of the Islamic community but also equips them to become agents of positive change in a diverse and dynamic society.

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