

Fostering Character Education through Community-Based Socialpreneurship Initiatives among High School Students in Banda Aceh

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development of a character-building model that integrates the Merdeka Curriculum and School-Driven Program to foster religious and social care values among high school students in Banda Aceh. Using a **qualitative approach**, data was collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis, involving school principals, teachers, students, and community members from four high schools in Banda Aceh. Triangulation of sources and techniques ensured data validity. **The findings** show that each school employs unique character-building strategies aligned with its vision and mission. The study emphasizes the importance of proactive school leadership, teacher engagement, and community collaboration in successful character education. To address challenges such as cultural differences, student readiness, and resource limitations, the Busi (Islamic School Culture) model was developed. This model integrates religious values and social activities, enhancing students discipline, empathy, and social skills. The implementation of the Busi model led to significant improvements in students moral and social development. **The study underscores** the need for integrating religious and social values into the curriculum and fostering collaboration between schools, families, and communities to achieve holistic character education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is a critical component of Indonesia's education system, as outlined in the National Education Law [1]. Its primary objective is to shape individuals with noble character, social awareness, and a sense of responsibility [2]. Particularly in high schools, character-building models focusing on religious and social values play a crucial role in shaping students moral and ethical outlook. In Banda Aceh, schools are uniquely positioned to foster character development through integrated efforts involving curriculum adjustments, community engagement, and leadership initiatives [3]. However, the variability in approaches, from religiously-driven practices in "boarding" schools to the Merdeka Curriculum implementations in regular schools, highlights the need for a unified yet context-sensitive framework.

Research on character education underscores the significance of holistic approaches that integrate

moral values with cognitive and emotional development. Thomas Lickona's model emphasizes "moral knowing", "moral feeling", and "moral action", advocating for comprehensive methods. Recent studies [4] show that character education can enhance psychological well-being and social interaction among students. In the Indonesian context, scholars like [5] stress the alignment of character-building initiatives with local cultural and religious values.

The empirical findings reveal diverse strategies and outcomes in implementing character education. [6] demonstrated that leadership in "School-Driven Programs" impacts the effectiveness of character-building efforts, while [7] reported the successes of integrating Islamic values into everyday school activities. Studies like [8] emphasize the role of flexible curricula in addressing local needs. However, these findings also indicate challenges, including cultural diversity and resource limitations.

Despite the extensive research, there remains a lack of models tailored to the socio-cultural dynamics of Banda Aceh's schools, which encompass diverse structures such as boarding schools and Merdeka Curriculum schools. Current studies predominantly focus on generic frameworks or isolated case studies without addressing the nuanced interplay of leadership, community involvement, and religious integration. This research aims to fill this gap by developing a comprehensive model for fostering religious and social care character in high schools across Banda Aceh.

This study is significant for its contribution to both theory and practice. It provides a robust framework that integrates religious and social values into school curriculum and activities, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders. By addressing the specific challenges and leveraging the cultural strengths of Banda Aceh, this research aims to serve as a blueprint for character education across similar contexts in Indonesia and beyond [9].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Character education is a cornerstone of moral and ethical development in educational settings. According to [10], character education integrates three key components, moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. This triadic approach enables students to internalize values, empathize with others, and act ethically. Similarly, Kohlberg's theory of moral development highlights the progressive nature of moral reasoning, emphasizing the importance of education in fostering ethical decision-making skills [11]. Studies such as [12] advocate for a holistic approach, integrating emotional and social development with moral instruction to address complex moral dilemmas.



Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Point 4 and 10

In Indonesia, character education aligns closely with the nation's cultural and religious values. Research by [6] and [13] shows how integrating local values into school curricula strengthens students' moral foundations and prepares them to face societal challenges. These findings underscore the potential of character education to shape individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally sound. In the context of global education, the Busi Model aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [14], particularly SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and SDGs 10 (Reduced Inequality). By integrating religious and social

care values into education, the model supports the global agenda of providing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Through community engagement and leadership development, the model empowers students to engage in activities that foster social cohesion and reduce inequalities. These efforts contribute to building a more inclusive society, aligning with the principles of SDGs 10, which aims to reduce inequality and promote social justice [15].

Religious character is a vital component of moral education, particularly in culturally rich regions like Aceh. Ibnu Miskawaih's ethical philosophy views morality as an integral part of personal and social development, focusing on nurturing the soul's potential [16]. His framework provides a theoretical foundation for incorporating religious principles into character education.

Empirical studies demonstrate the effectiveness of religious education in fostering ethical and spiritual growth. [17] highlighted how religious values embedded in school cultures contribute to students' moral resilience. Similarly, initiatives such as daily prayers, Quranic studies, and service-learning projects have been shown to enhance empathy, discipline, and social awareness among students [18]. Despite these successes, challenges such as varying levels of student readiness and resource constraints persist, emphasizing the need for adaptive models.

Social care, an extension of moral education, involves cultivating empathy, cooperation, and community engagement among students. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory underscores the role of observation and interaction in learning prosocial behaviors. In schools, collaborative activities such as community service and peer mentoring have proven effective in fostering these values [19].

In the Indonesian context, research by [20] revealed that character-building projects aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum improve students' empathy and teamwork skills. These projects often involve collaborative efforts with local communities, reflecting the importance of cultural relevance in character education. However, studies also note the need for consistent teacher training and community involvement to maximize the impact of such initiatives [21].

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced to promote flexible and context-specific learning, emphasizes project-based learning as a medium for character education. Studies by [22] demonstrate how integrating religious and social care values into projects enhances students' ethical awareness and sense of responsibility. For instance, activities like environmental campaigns or charity events align with the curriculum's goals of fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and moral integrity.

Furthermore, the curriculum's adaptability enables schools to tailor character-building programs to local needs. In Banda Aceh, leveraging Islamic traditions and community values can create a powerful synergy for character education. However, as highlighted by [23], effective implementation requires strong leadership and resource allocation.

Despite the wealth of research, existing studies often focus on isolated aspects of character education, such as religious instruction or social care projects. Few address the integration of these dimensions into a cohesive framework, particularly in diverse educational contexts like Banda Aceh. Moreover, there is limited exploration of how school leadership, community engagement, and curriculum flexibility can be harmonized to overcome challenges and optimize outcomes [24, 25].

This research aims to bridge these gaps by developing a comprehensive model for religious and social care character education. By focusing on the unique socio-cultural landscape of Banda Aceh, this study seeks to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical implementation of character education [26].

3. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on exploring the complexities of character-building practices in high schools in Banda Aceh. It uses a descriptive-interpretative design to capture the unique processes and strategies schools implement to foster religious and social care character among students. Four schools were selected for the study, representing diverse contexts, including regular public schools, a progressive School-Driven Program institution, and a boarding school. The participants consist of principals, teachers, students, and community members, ensuring a holistic understanding of the implementation and impact of character education.

Data collection is conducted through multiple methods to enhance the depth and validity of the findings [27–29]. The data analysis process followed a systematic approach. First, the transcribed data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were coded. Open coding was used to break down the data

into discrete units of meaning. These units were then grouped into initial categories such as ‘leadership roles’, ‘community involvement’, and ‘student behavior’. In the second phase, the categories were refined and merged into broader themes, for example, ‘religious integration’ and ‘social care initiatives’. The final step involved interpreting these themes in the context of the research objectives. Triangulation was used to validate the findings by comparing insights from the different data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). This approach ensured the accuracy and reliability of the themes and provided a comprehensive understanding of character education practices in the schools.

The analysis involved descriptive and interpretative techniques to identify themes and patterns in the data, such as leadership roles, curriculum integration, and student behavior changes [5, 30, 31]. To ensure validity, the study utilized triangulation, member checking, and a robust audit trail. Ethical considerations were prioritized, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural respect. Ultimately, this method provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of how character education is practiced in Banda Aceh, contributing to the development of a holistic model for fostering religious and social care character in diverse educational contexts.

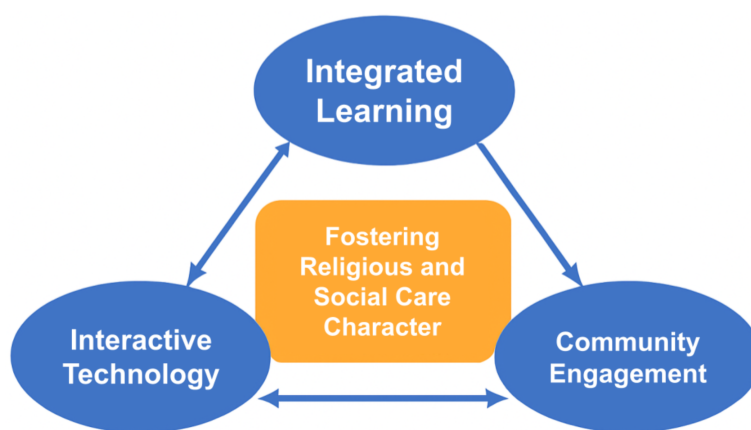


Figure 2. Diagram Busi Model

As shown in Figure 2, the Busi Model integrates three key components Integrated Learning, Interactive Technology, and Community Engagement to foster Religious and Social Care Character in students. This diagram visually represents the interconnection between academic learning, technology usage, and community involvement, highlighting how these elements work together to support the central goal of moral and social development. The model offers a holistic approach to character education, ensuring that religious values and social responsibility are reinforced through an integrated, technology-driven, and community-oriented framework.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

The study was conducted in four high schools in Banda Aceh: State Senior High School 3, State Senior High School 7, State Senior High School 10, and State Senior High School 12. Each school tailored its approach to its unique vision, mission, and the sociocultural dynamics of its environment. This customization helped address local challenges and meet community expectations, leading to a variety of strategies for instilling religious and social values in students.

4.1.1. Religious Integration in Character-Building

Religious integration in schools serves as a cornerstone for character-building by embedding Islamic teachings into both curricular and extracurricular activities. By incorporating habitual practices such as dhuha prayers, Qur'an study groups, and religious seminars, schools in Banda Aceh fostered an environment where students could consistently engage with core Islamic values. These activities nurtured discipline, spirituality, and empathy essential qualities in developing well-rounded individuals rooted in faith and morality.

One notable example of religious integration was the introduction of structured dhuha prayers. Held during school hours, this activity cultivated a habit of regular worship and reflection among students, encouraging a personal connection with Allah. As stated in the Qur'an,

"And establish prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night. Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds. That is a reminder for those who remember."
(QS. Hud/11:114).

This verse emphasizes the spiritual purification gained through consistent prayer, a value instilled through school-led worship practices. Similarly, Qur'an study groups provided a collaborative platform for students to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings. In these sessions, students engaged in the recitation, interpretation, and discussion of verses, often drawing lessons applicable to their daily lives. This activity aligned with the Qur'anic injunction:

"This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah."
(QS. Al-Baqarah/2:2).

By engaging with the Qur'an, students developed a framework for moral reasoning and decision-making, reinforcing their ethical behavior. Religious seminars also played a pivotal role in shaping students' character by exposing them to discussions on Islamic values and their relevance to modern challenges. Topics such as honesty, compassion, and responsibility were explored, guiding students to integrate these principles into their actions. The emphasis on ethics resonates with the verse:

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing."
(QS. An-Nisa/4:58).

Through these seminars, students were encouraged to embody justice and trustworthiness in their academic and social interactions. Classroom lessons further supported this integration by embedding moral education themes across subjects. Teachers incorporated discussions on Islamic ethics into lessons, reinforcing key values such as honesty, tolerance, and respect for others. For instance, the importance of honesty was highlighted in light of the Qur'anic guidance:

"And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it]."
(QS. Al-Baqarah/2:42).

This consistent emphasis on morality ensured that students not only grasped ethical principles but also internalized them as guiding values.

Religious integration in schools strengthens students character by promoting values central to Islam. Activities such as prayer, Qur'anic studies, and moral education help students develop discipline, empathy, and ethical behavior, grounding their personal growth in spiritual teachings. This alignment with Qur'anic values creates individuals who are not only academically capable but also spiritually grounded, ready to contribute positively to society.

4.1.2. Social Care Programs

Social care programs serve as an integral part of fostering values like empathy, teamwork, and a sense of social responsibility among students. The study highlights that experiential learning through activities such as community service projects, environmental clean-ups, and charity events provides a platform for students to directly engage with societal issues. This hands-on approach enhances their understanding of community needs while instilling a commitment to contribute meaningfully to their surroundings.

One of the most effective strategies for developing social care values is the inclusion of community service projects. These initiatives involved students in activities such as volunteering at orphanages, organizing donation drives, and assisting the elderly. Participation in these programs helped students understand the significance of helping others, as emphasized in the Qur'an:

"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain]; it grows seven ears, and in every ear is a hundred grains. Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills"

(QS. Al-Baqarah/2:261).

These projects reinforced the value of selflessness, demonstrating how small acts of giving could lead to substantial societal benefits. Environmental clean-up campaigns were another notable component of social care programs. Students engaged in activities such as cleaning public spaces, planting trees, and organizing recycling initiatives. These activities cultivated environmental stewardship and a sense of collective responsibility among students, aligning with the Qur'anic mandate:

"And do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption"

(QS. Al-Baqarah/2:60).

Through such efforts, the students developed an appreciation for the natural world and their role in preserving it for future generations. Charity events offered students an opportunity to engage with the broader community. Organizing and participating in fundraising activities for underprivileged groups not only fostered teamwork and organizational skills but also deepened empathy for those in need. The importance of supporting the less fortunate is underscored in the Qur'an:

"They give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive"

(Surah Al-Insan: 8).

By involving themselves in charitable initiatives, students embraced the spirit of generosity and social care as cornerstones of their character. These activities were designed to move beyond the theoretical understanding of social values, allowing students to experience their application firsthand. For instance, working collaboratively in these programs strengthened students teamwork and interpersonal skills, encouraging them to value cooperation over competition. Moreover, engaging directly with community members provided students with insights into the challenges faced by diverse groups, fostering empathy and a commitment to act as agents of positive change.

Social care programs offer a powerful avenue for character-building by enabling students to actively engage in service to their communities. Activities like community service projects, environmental initiatives, and charitable events help develop critical qualities such as empathy, collaboration, and social awareness. Rooted in both Islamic principles and practical application, these programs create opportunities for students to embody the values necessary for meaningful contributions to society, shaping them into socially responsible and empathetic individuals.

4.1.3. Success of the Busi Model

The Busi Model, or Islamic School Culture Model, has emerged as an effective framework for integrating religious values and social care into education. Its strength lies in its structured and systematic approach, comprising three core components: Integrated Learning, Interactive Technology, and Community Engagement. These elements synergize to create a holistic system that fosters religious and social character in students, equipping them with the skills and responsibility necessary for modern life.

At the heart of the Busi Model is the principle of integrated learning. This component ensures that Islamic values are seamlessly embedded into academic instruction and extracurricular activities. Subjects across the curriculum are designed to incorporate moral and ethical dimensions, creating a consistent reinforcement of values throughout the learning process. For instance, science classes might discuss environmental stewardship from an ethical perspective, while social studies could explore justice and equity. This multidisciplinary integration ensures that students develop a strong moral foundation alongside academic knowledge, fostering a mindset attuned to both religious devotion and social responsibility.

Additionally, extracurricular activities such as service projects, peer mentoring, and student-led discussions on moral dilemmas provide experiential learning opportunities. These activities enable students to practice what they learn in real-world contexts, cultivating traits like empathy, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving.

Another essential component of the Busi Model is its use of interactive technology to support and enhance the educational experience. Digital tools such as learning management systems and mobile apps offer

resources tailored to the moral and social development of students. Interactive platforms encourage students to engage with religious texts and social issues, creating opportunities for reflective discussions and collaborative learning. For example, digital simulations and virtual forums allow students to analyze case studies on ethical dilemmas or participate in community problem-solving exercises.

The adoption of technology also ensures inclusivity and adaptability. Students with different learning needs or from varied cultural contexts can access materials suited to their levels and preferences. Furthermore, gamified learning elements foster engagement, making the educational process both impactful and enjoyable.

Community involvement is a cornerstone of the Busi Model, providing a bridge between school-based initiatives and societal needs. Schools regularly partner with local organizations, religious institutions, and social groups to extend their programs beyond the classroom. Community service projects, charity events, and environmental campaigns encourage students to engage directly with the wider community, developing their social awareness and commitment.

This collaboration also strengthens the relationships between educators, parents, and community stakeholders, creating a supportive ecosystem that reinforces the values taught in schools. Regular workshops and forums involving these groups ensure alignment in goals and foster shared responsibility for the students' character development.

Table 1. The Busi Model's

Component	Key Features	Examples of Implementation
Integrated Learning	- Integrating religious values into various subjects such as Islamic Education (PAI), history, and science. - Project-based learning modules involving practical and collaborative activities.	- Islamic Education classes teach moral values through case studies from Islamic history and Acehese culture, combining religious studies with general knowledge. - Group projects that require students to create social campaigns on Pancasila values and religiosity in local contexts.
Interactive Technology	- Mobile apps for Quran memorization and religious studies, including evaluation and progress tracking features. - Digital platforms for discussions, virtual classes, and self-directed learning.	- Using Quran memorization apps that allow students to independently monitor their progress, complete with scheduling systems and teacher feedback. - Virtual classes connecting students with external mentors for discussions on religious and social topics.
Community Engagement	- Social projects and charity activities to develop empathy and social responsibility. - Collaborations with local organizations and cross-cultural activities to strengthen inclusivity and tolerance values.	- Regular community service activities such as donation drives, environmental clean-ups, and visits to orphanages. - Partnerships with local organizations to conduct workshops on moral and spiritual values in the community.

The Busi Model's systematic approach has significantly improved student outcomes in terms of discipline, empathy, and moral integrity. Through integrated learning, students not only understand Islamic principles but also apply them meaningfully in their daily lives. Technology has amplified the model's reach and effectiveness, making the learning experience interactive and relevant. Meanwhile, community engagement deepens students' connection with societal issues and their responsibility as active citizens.

The success of the Busi Model demonstrates its potential to create a nurturing educational environment that shapes individuals who are morally grounded, socially responsible, and academically proficient. Unlike traditional models of character education that often focus solely on either religious or social values, the Busi Model uniquely integrates both dimensions, emphasizing the synergy between Islamic teachings and social responsibility activities. This integration is particularly evident when compared to other frameworks such as the School-Driven Program, which lacks this dual emphasis, or globally recognized models like [32] that predominantly concentrate on moral reasoning without incorporating the community engagement aspect found in Busi. Its structured approach serves as a replicable framework that can benefit schools seeking to balance religious values with modern educational practices.

4.1.4. Challenges Identified

The implementation of a character-building model focusing on religious and social care among high school students in Banda Aceh faced several challenges requiring tailored solutions. The first challenge was cultural diversity, necessitating the adaptation of programs to accommodate the varied cultural backgrounds of students. This approach ensured that the values taught were inclusive and relevant to all learners. Another significant issue was student readiness. Some students needed time and mentorship to acclimate to activities emphasizing character education, which called for gradual and supportive guidance.

Resource limitations, including financial and logistical constraints, posed significant barriers, particularly for large-scale project implementation. Despite these obstacles, strategic solutions were employed to overcome them. Continuous teacher training programs were prioritized to enhance educators' ability to integrate character values into their teaching methods. Schools also partnered with local communities to organize activities that reinforced social care values, fostering stronger communal ties and practical learning opportunities for students.

Creative resource optimization was another key strategy. For instance, leveraging technology helped distribute educational content more efficiently, enabling broader access to character-building materials. Collaboration among schools, families, and the community played a crucial role in reinforcing the program's impact. Parents were actively involved in supporting their children's character development at home, while social activities in the community allowed students to practice empathy and social responsibility in real-life contexts.

These efforts demonstrate that, despite the challenges, character education can be effectively implemented through a holistic approach. By engaging all stakeholders schools, families, and the wider community the program fosters an environment where students not only learn moral and social values but also embody them in their daily lives.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Role of School Leadership and Teachers

Effective school leadership and teachers are crucial in fostering an environment that promotes character development among students. Principals, as key leaders, serve as the backbone of a positive school culture by acting as facilitators. According to [33], school leadership significantly influences the success of character-building programs by encouraging teachers to innovate and adapt their teaching methods to meet students unique needs. This leadership fosters a collaborative and inclusive environment, empowering teachers to integrate character education seamlessly into the curriculum.

Principals ability to set a clear vision for ethical values, social responsibility, and integrity ensures that these priorities become the foundation of all school activities. As observed by [34], principals leadership style directly impacts teachers performance and commitment to character-building initiatives. Furthermore, their example inspires teachers to embody and model ethical behavior, enhancing their credibility as role models for students. By engaging parents and community stakeholders, principals create a holistic approach that strengthens the impact of character education programs.

Teachers, on the other hand, play a frontline role in implementing character education. As highlighted by [35], teachers are central to integrating character-building into classroom activities and fostering a culture of ethical behavior among students. Acting as both instructors and role models, teachers instill values through their actions, words, and attitudes, significantly influencing how students internalize and practice these principles. A teacher's demonstration of fairness, empathy, and integrity serves as a living lesson in ethical conduct, encouraging students to emulate these qualities.

Moreover, teachers design and deliver character-building activities that resonate with students cultural and social contexts. Activities such as ethical discussions or community service projects not only teach moral values but also provide practical applications that deepen students' understanding. [36] emphasize the importance of aligning these activities with local cultural frameworks to make lessons more impactful and relatable to students' lives.

Collaboration between school leaders and teachers is vital for the sustained success of character education initiatives. As noted by [37], involving teachers in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership and enhances their commitment to character-building programs. This collaborative approach encourages innovation and ensures that programs are continuously refined to meet evolving student needs. Professional development opportunities provided by school leadership further equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to address challenges effectively.

The synergy between school leadership and teachers is indispensable in creating a nurturing environment that supports character education [38, 39]. Principals provide the structural framework, while teachers implement daily practices that bring character-building to life. Together, they ensure that character education is not merely a program but an integral part of the school's mission and identity. This partnership, as highlighted by [4], cultivates an atmosphere where students are inspired to develop strong moral and social values, preparing them to become responsible and ethical members of society.

4.2.2. Utilizing Technology for Religious Education

Incorporating digital platforms into religious education has significantly enhanced the delivery and engagement of students with Islamic teachings. The integration of technology supports interactive and flexible learning methods that complement traditional approaches, offering students diverse tools to deepen their understanding of religious values. This approach aligns with findings that education incorporating digital tools promotes inclusivity, adaptability, and relevance in contemporary educational contexts.

Educational apps and platforms provide accessible resources such as Quranic study tools with audio recitations, translations, and interpretations, as well as video lectures and quizzes to reinforce understanding [40]. According to research findings within the document, technology plays an essential role in making religious education engaging and effective. For example, the Journal of Religious Education emphasizes the importance of integrating religious literacy into broader educational frameworks, enhancing both spiritual and moral understanding [41, 42]. Similarly, [3] study highlights how digital resources help students explore religious content interactively, thereby fostering deeper learning experiences.

Online forums and virtual classrooms are also key elements, enabling collaborative learning and discussions that connect students with teachers, peers, and scholars [43]. These platforms cultivate critical thinking and encourage respect for diverse viewpoints, reflecting a community-centered approach rooted in Islamic values. The study by [44] underscores how online interactions in educational settings encourage ethical decision-making and promote inclusive learning environments in religious education.

Another benefit of digital integration is its ability to cater to various learning styles [45, 46]. Visual learners benefit from videos and infographics, while auditory learners gain insights through podcasts and live webinars. This adaptability ensures that students with different preferences can engage effectively. Furthermore, the asynchronous nature of many digital tools allows students to learn at their own pace, revisiting complex topics as needed a point supported by [2] findings on the role of digital flexibility in enhancing character education.

Technology also offers an opportunity to instill digital ethics in students as part of religious education. Lessons on online etiquette, privacy, and responsible social media use align with the broader framework of moral and ethical instruction [47]. This dual approach is supported by insights from studies on the role of digital platforms in fostering ethical behavior, which highlight the importance of guiding students to apply religious values in both their personal and online interactions [48].

Moreover, technology bridges traditional values and modern challenges, ensuring the relevance of religious education in addressing contemporary issues [49]. Digital tools allow students to connect Islamic principles with real-world scenarios, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the timeless applicability of religious teachings. Research by [50] confirms that reflective digital exercises help students contextualize their learning, making moral and spiritual teachings more impactful.

The integration of technology into religious education enhances accessibility, engagement, and relevance, preparing students to navigate the complexities of modern life with a strong ethical foundation. By blending traditional values with innovative tools, educators ensure that students internalize Islamic teachings while developing digital literacy a forward-thinking approach that meets the evolving needs of society.

4.2.3. Relevance to the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, allowing schools to adapt character education programs to align with local cultural and societal contexts. This adaptability ensures that education remains relevant and impactful by addressing the specific needs and values of the community. According to [1], the curriculum's project-based learning approach provides a practical framework for integrating character education with meaningful activities that resonate with students. For example, initiatives such as organizing donation drives or participating in neighborhood improvement projects not only teach students values such as cooperation, generosity, and humility but also allow them to witness these values in action [51, 52].

One of the strengths of the Merdeka Curriculum is its focus on experiential learning. Students are encouraged to participate in real-world projects that bridge classroom concepts with community engagement. [53] highlighted that these projects help students develop a deeper understanding of moral and social values by applying them to practical situations. For instance, a school-organized clean-up drive in a local community enables students to collaborate, demonstrating teamwork and mutual respect while addressing environmental issues. Such experiences make learning more meaningful as students see the tangible impact of their actions.

The Merdeka Curriculum also prioritizes the integration of local cultural values into character education. This alignment ensures that students remain connected to their heritage while developing a sense of global citizenship. As noted by [48], contextualizing character education within local traditions enhances its relevance and acceptance among students and the wider community. For instance, in Banda Aceh, where Islamic values are deeply rooted in the local culture, schools utilize the curriculum's flexibility to incorporate religious principles into their activities. Activities such as Quranic recitation competitions or zakat distribution campaigns teach students the importance of faith-based values, linking their religious teachings to actionable outcomes.

Another critical aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is its emphasis on student-centered learning. By allowing students to take ownership of projects, the curriculum fosters a sense of responsibility and autonomy. [54] observed that student-led initiatives, such as peer mentoring or organizing workshops on social issues, enhance leadership skills and promote a proactive approach to character development. This autonomy encourages students to internalize values rather than passively learning about them, leading to a more profound and lasting impact [55, 56].

Furthermore, the curriculum's emphasis on collaborative learning prepares students to work effectively with others in diverse settings. [27] social learning theory, underscores the importance of observation and interaction in shaping behavior. In project-based activities, students learn to navigate interpersonal challenges, resolve conflicts, and contribute to group goals, all of which reinforce the values of empathy and cooperation.

The Merdeka Curriculum's flexibility and emphasis on project-based learning make it a powerful tool for character education. By aligning activities with local cultural contexts, fostering experiential learning, and prioritizing student agency, the curriculum ensures that character education is both meaningful and relevant. These approaches prepare students not only to excel academically but also to contribute positively to their communities, embodying values that will guide them throughout their lives.

5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Busi Model offers a flexible framework that can be adapted to other regions and educational settings. While the study was conducted in Banda Aceh, the core components of Integrated Learning, Interactive Technology, and Community Engagement make the model applicable in a variety of contexts. Educators and policymakers in different regions can tailor the model to align with local cultural, religious, and social values. For example, in regions with diverse religious backgrounds, the model can incorporate local spiritual teachings, whereas in secular settings, it can focus on universal social care values. Furthermore, the model's adaptability extends to various educational levels, including vocational schools, universities, and community education programs, offering opportunities for broader implementation across different educational systems.

Furthermore, the Busi Model also offers practical guidance for strengthening institutional collaboration, resource management, and inclusive learning environments. School leaders can leverage the model to build partnerships with community organizations, religious institutions, and local governments to support program implementation and long-term sustainability. By adopting a data informed approach, policymakers can monitor student development more effectively and use the findings to refine curriculum design, allocate resources strategically, and enhance teacher training. At the same time, the model allows administrators to identify gaps in student engagement and tailor interventions, such as mentorship programs, technology enhanced learning tools, and community based service projects so that every student benefits from holistic development opportunities. This integrated approach helps institutions promote equity, improve student well-being, and foster a more supportive and future-ready educational ecosystem.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research conducted in four high schools in Banda Aceh, it can be concluded that the concept of the religious character development model and social concern involves a holistic approach that integrates religious and social values into both the curriculum and extracurricular activities. State Senior

High School 3 focuses on habituating religious values, State Senior High School 7 adopts a community-based model, State Senior High School 10 uses an intensive dormitory-based approach, while State Senior High School 12 combines religious values with creative entrepreneurship. Each of these schools tailors its program to align with its specific vision and mission, ensuring that students are actively engaged in both spiritual and social development.

The development model implemented across the schools includes a variety of activities, such as congregational prayers, Qur'an studies, tahfidz programs, fundraising events, social service activities, and charity entrepreneurship programs. These activities are designed to encourage students to develop a sense of responsibility, both spiritually and socially. By incorporating these activities into the schools' programs, the institutions create an environment where students can grow in their understanding of religion while also becoming more socially aware and involved in the community. The implementation of the development model is carried out through routine activities, special programs, and collaboration with the community and parents. This collaborative effort ensures that the programs are well-rounded and that students receive continuous support in their development. The schools also use evaluation and feedback mechanisms to refine and improve the effectiveness of the programs. As a result, the implementation of these models has contributed to the development of students who are not only more religious but also socially responsible and equipped with relevant life skills that can benefit them in their future endeavors.

The study has several limitations that should be taken into account. First, it only focuses on high schools in Banda Aceh, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts. Additionally, the study primarily relied on qualitative data from interviews and observations, which may have introduced subjective biases. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the scope to include a larger and more diverse sample of schools from different regions, as well as incorporating quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of these programs. Further studies could also explore the long-term impact of these character development programs on students, particularly how they influence students' personal growth and their contributions to society in the future.

7. DECLARATIONS

7.1. About Authors

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7.2. Author Contributions

Conceptualization: NN; Methodology: SH; Software: MA; Validation: SS and NN; Formal Analysis: SH and MA; Investigation: NN; Resources: SH; Data Curation: MA; Writing Original Draft Preparation: NN and SS; Writing Review and Editing: MA and SH; Visualization: SH; All authors, NN, SH, MA, and SS, have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

7.3. Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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7.5. Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest, known competing financial interests, or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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