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Children's Character Education in the Qur'an: A Thematic Study in Contemporary Exegesis and Its Relevance to the Core Values of SPMAA

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Abstract

Children's character education is a fundamental issue that has been a concern of the Qur'an since its revelation, as illustrated in exemplary stories of child-rearing, such as Luqman's advice to his son. This study aims to identify the concept of children's character education in the Qur'an according to contemporary interpretations, as well as to examine its relevance to the core values upheld by the Sumber Pendidikan Mental Agama Allah (SPMAA) Islamic Boarding School Foundation, namely the Three Great Projects of Humanity: Getting to Know Allah Intimately and Fundamentally, Training Oneself to Recognize the Unseen Enemy, and Cultivating Belief in the Hereafter. This study employs a qualitative method using a literature review (library research) and thematic exegesis (maudhu'i) analysis, by compiling Qur'anic verses on children's education and examining their interpretations in contemporary exegetical works such as Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Tafsir Al-Munir, and Tafsir Al-Azhar. The results of the study indicate that the three core values of SPMAA are substantially aligned with the principles of character education in the Qur'an, namely the instillation of tawhid as the foundation of moral character, the cultivation of self-discipline (mujahadah an-nafs) as a means of maintaining moral integrity, and the instillation of awareness of the Hereafter as the foundation for generosity and responsibility. These findings reinforce the argument that local-value-based Islamic boarding schools, such as SPMAA, can serve as an operational model for Qur'anic character education for children within the community.

Keywords: Character Education; Children; The Qur'an; Contemporary Exegesis; SPMAA Core Values.

Abstrak

Pendidikan karakter anak merupakan persoalan mendasar yang menjadi perhatian Al-Qur'an sejak awal diturunkan, sebagaimana tergambar dalam kisah-kisah keteladanan mendidik anak seperti nasihat Luqman kepada putranya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi konsep pendidikan karakter anak dalam Al-Qur'an menurut penafsiran kontemporer, serta mengkaji relevansinya dengan nilai-nilai dasar yang dianut Yayasan Pondok Pesantren Sumber Pendidikan Mental Agama Allah (SPMAA), yakni Tiga Proyek Besar Umat Manusia: Mengenal Allah Secara Mendekat dan Mendasar, Melatih Diri Mengetahui Musuh Ghaib, dan Menanam Keyakinan Dunia Akhirat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kepustakaan (library research) dan analisis tafsir tematik (maudhu'i), dengan menghimpun ayat-ayat Al-

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Karakter; Anak; Al-Qur'an; Tafsir Kontemporer; Nilai Dasar SPMAA.

Qur'an tentang pendidikan anak serta menelaah penafsirannya dalam kitab-kitab tafsir kontemporer seperti Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Tafsir Al-Munir, dan Tafsir Al-Azhar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga nilai dasar SPMAA memiliki keselarasan substansial dengan prinsip-prinsip pendidikan karakter dalam Al-Qur'an, yaitu penanaman tauhid sebagai fondasi akhlak, pelatihan pengendalian diri (mujahadah an-nafs) sebagai jalan menjaga integritas moral, dan penanaman kesadaran akhirat sebagai landasan sikap dermawan dan bertanggung jawab. Temuan ini memperkuat argumen bahwa pesantren berbasis nilai lokal seperti SPMAA dapat menjadi model operasional pendidikan karakter Qur'ani bagi anak di lingkungan masyarakat.

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1. Introduction

Character education is one of the most pressing issues in contemporary Islamic education. The growing concern over moral decline among the younger generation, reflected in increasing juvenile delinquency, violence against children, and a lack of exemplary role models in public life, underscores the urgent need to strengthen character education rooted in Islamic values from an early age. The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings and a rich repository of universal educational principles, offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for character formation. This framework is exemplified in the story of Luqman the Wise's advice to his son (Qur'an 31:12–19), which has been widely recognized by Qur'anic exegetes as a fundamental reference for nurturing children's faith, moral conduct, and personal development.

On the other hand, pesantren-based educational institutions in Indonesia have long developed character education models rooted in local values while also drawing from the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. One such institution is the Sumber Pendidikan Mental Agama Allah (SPMAA) Islamic Boarding School Foundation, established on October 27, 1961, in Turi Village, Turi Subdistrict, Lamongan Regency, East Java. This foundation was born out of the concern of Mr. Muhammad Abdullah Muchtar regarding the conditions of communities in underdeveloped areas, and since its inception, it has been committed to integrating spiritual and mental development with the socio-economic empowerment of the community through the Shelter for the Poor, Needy, and Orphans (PPFMYP).

SPMAA upholds core institutional values known as the "Three Great Projects of Humanity," namely: (1) Getting to Know Allah Intimately and Fundamentally, (2) Training Oneself to Recognize the Unseen Enemy, and (3) Cultivating Faith in the Hereafter. These three values are not merely institutional slogans but an educational philosophy that substantively addresses the dimensions of tawhid (monotheism), self-control, and a worldly-hereafter orientation—three dimensions that also form the core of contemporary exegetes' discussions when interpreting the verses on children's education in the Qur'an.

Based on this exposition, this study seeks to answer three main questions: first, how is the concept of children's character education explained in the Qur'an according to a thematic analysis? Second, how are these verses interpreted by contemporary exegetes? Third, how relevant are SPMAA's core values to the concept of children's character education as contained in the Qur'an and these contemporary interpretations? This study is expected to make an academic contribution to the development of applied thematic exegesis, while also providing a theological-normative foundation for strengthening the character education curriculum at SPMAA Islamic boarding schools and other Islamic educational institutions.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design using a literature review approach. The data sources are divided into primary and secondary sources. The primary data consist of two categories. The first includes Qur'anic verses relevant to children's character education, based on the Qur'an published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), particularly Surah Luqman (31:12–19), Surah An-Nisa (4:9), Surah At-Tahrim (66:6), and Surah Al-Isra (17:23–24), together with their interpretations in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis. The exegetical works examined are *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* by M. Quraish Shihab (2002), *Tafsir Al-Munir* by Wahbah az-Zuhaili (2013), and *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by Hamka (1982). The second category comprises internal documents of the SPMAA Foundation, particularly *SPMAA Core Values* and *The Early History of SPMAA*, which provide philosophical explanations of the Three Great Projects of Humanity and the historical background of the institution (Muchtar, 2008). Secondary data include books, journal articles, and previous studies relevant to character education and thematic Qur'anic exegesis.

Data analysis was conducted using the *maudhu'i* (thematic) interpretation method formulated by Al-Farmawi (1977). This method involves several steps: (1) identifying and compiling Qur'anic verses relevant to the theme of children's character education; (2) arranging the verses chronologically and considering their occasions of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*), where applicable; (3) examining the relationships among the verses (*munasabah*); (4) structuring the discussion within a coherent analytical framework; and (5) integrating the interpretive perspectives and principles of contemporary Qur'anic scholars. The collected data were subsequently examined through descriptive-analytical techniques and *content analysis* to identify points of convergence and conceptual relevance between the principles of children's character education derived from the Qur'an and the core values of the SPMAA Foundation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. The Concept of Children's Character Education from the Perspective of the Qur'an

In Islamic scholarship, character education is closely linked to the terms *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. *Tarbiyah* emphasizes the process of nurturing and gradually developing a child's potential; *ta'lim* is oriented toward the transfer of

knowledge; while *ta'dib* places greater emphasis on instilling manners and moral character. These three terms complement one another in shaping a child's well-rounded personality, encompassing cognitive, spiritual, and behavioral dimensions. The Qur'an does not present the concept of character education in a systematic-theoretical manner as in modern educational science, but rather through exemplary stories, parables, and direct advice rich in moral values.

The story of Luqman the Wise's advice to his son in Surah Luqman: 12-19 serves as the most popular reference in discussions of children's character education in the Qur'an. These verses contain at least five elements of character education: the instillation of monotheism and the prohibition against polytheism (verse 13), respect for one's parents or *birrul walidain* (verses 14–15), awareness of Allah's oversight, which encompasses even the smallest matters (verse 16), the command to perform prayer and *to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong*, accompanied by patience (verse 17), and social etiquette in the form of a prohibition against arrogance and an encouragement to walk modestly and speak softly (verses 18-19).

3.2. Contemporary Interpretations of Verses on Children's Character Education

In *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, M. Quraish Shihab (2002) emphasizes that Luqman's counsel serves as a model of education rooted in compassion (*mahabbah*) and firm adherence to values, where the instillation of tawhid is prioritized above the shaping of social behavior. The assertion that polytheism is a great injustice (verse 13) is understood as the epistemological foundation for the entire character education process—good character cannot be built without a sound theological foundation.

Wahbah az-Zuhaili (2013), in *his Tafsir Al-Munir* , highlights the systematic educational structure in Luqman's counsel, which progresses from the realm of faith (tawhid) to worship (salat), and then to social ethics (the prohibition against arrogance and the virtue of modesty). This structure, according to az-Zuhaili, demonstrates that character education in the Qur'an is integrative: it does not separate the spiritual dimension from the social-ethical dimension of behavior.

Meanwhile, Hamka (1982), in *his Tafsir Al-Azhar* , emphasizes a contextual Indonesian perspective, in which the values of simplicity, obedience to parents, and social concern—as found in the verses on childrearing—are linked to the realities of life in the diverse societies of the Indonesian archipelago. Hamka also highlights Surah Ar-Rum: 7 and Surah Al-Qashash: 77 as the basis for a balance between worldly and otherworldly orientations, which must be instilled from an early age so that children do not grow up to be purely materialistic individuals.

3.3. Profile and History of the SPMAA Foundation

The SPMAA (Pondok Pesantren Sumber Pendidikan Mental Agama Allah) Foundation was established on October 27, 1961, in Turi Village, Turi Subdistrict, Lamongan Regency, East Java. This institution is a non-profit, community- -driven development organization active in the fields of social welfare, education, the environment, and community economic empowerment through spiritual and

mental development programs. SPMAA was founded out of the concern of Mr. Muhammad Abdullah Muchtar regarding the conditions of communities in underdeveloped areas, which at that time were still receiving minimal attention from existing institutions (Muchtar, 2008).

In the early stages, this vision was realized through the establishment of the Shelter for the Poor and Orphans (PPFMYP), which provided vocational training and care for orphaned children. Recognizing that the children in the shelter also had spiritual needs, a pesantren was established as an institution to provide religious education; it was later named Sumber Pendidikan Mental Agama Allah (SPMAA) a name that remains the institution's official identity to this day. In 1979, the SPMAA Foundation was officially incorporated, and since 1978, it has also been developing *community development* strategies by mentoring micro-entrepreneurs, farmers, and fishermen so they can access the resources needed by the community.

3.4. SPMAA's Core Values: The Three Great Projects of Humanity

The SPMAA Foundation is guided by three core institutional values known as the Three Great Projects of Humanity (Muchtar, 2008), as follows.

3.4.1. Knowing God Intimately and Fundamentally

At the beginning of their creation, human beings originated from a single drop of lowly semen. Through a perfectly orchestrated process within the womb, Allah shaped them into complete human beings with diverse forms, abilities, and unique qualities. From this same process, the various human races and all living creatures on Earth were created. All of this demonstrates the greatness of Allah as the Most Exalted Creator.

For all the blessings bestowed freely, humans ought to be grateful to Allah. In reality, however, humans are often more preoccupied with enjoying and competing over His creation than with knowing, loving, and obeying the Creator. All the natural resources that humans enjoy belong to Allah; therefore, gratitude should not only be directed toward His blessings but also manifested by drawing closer to Him.

Therefore, people are invited to get to know Allah intimately and deeply. The relationship between humans and Allah is likened to a fish that is always in the water but is unaware of the water surrounding it. Similarly, humans live within Allah's greatness, power, and presence, which fill the entire universe, even though they are often unaware of it.

The practice taught is to accustom oneself to sensing Allah's presence in every activity and every breath. God states in Surah Qaf, verse 16, that He is closer to humans than the vein in their neck. Awareness of this closeness fosters noble qualities—such as compassion, care, forgiveness, and a desire to help others—while simultaneously eroding traits like envy, jealousy, resentment, arrogance, and anger.

Just as clear glass is invisible even when right before one's eyes, so too can Allah not be seen with the physical eye, but His presence can be felt through the eye of the heart and faith. The awareness that Allah is always present will

make a person more cautious in their behavior and less likely to insult or hurt others.

According to this article, various conflicts, hostilities, and tensions in social and political life arise because people no longer feel Allah's presence in their every action. As a result, compassion is replaced by hatred, mutual sabotage, and a focus on personal or group interests.

Therefore, everyone is encouraged to get to know God more closely and deeply. By increasingly knowing and feeling His presence, it is hoped that a life filled with compassion, mutual aid, and a prioritization of the common good will flourish. This awareness will serve as the foundation for the creation of a peaceful, harmonious society and support the realization of a prosperous national and state life in this world and in the hereafter.

3.4.2. Training Ourselves to Recognize the Unseen Enemy (Satan)

Conflicts and hostilities that arise among people—whether between individuals or groups—stem from a misunderstanding of who the true enemy is. From an Islamic perspective, humanity's primary enemy is not fellow human beings, but Satan, who whispers various negative impulses into the heart to lead people into sin, hostility, and forgetfulness of Allah.

When a person follows every whisper of the heart without filtering it, they may be driven to commit various evils, such as anger, envy, malice, slander, arrogance, and even criminal acts. The Qur'an warns humanity (the Children of Adam) not to follow in the footsteps of Satan, for Satan is a real enemy (Quran 36:60). When Satan takes control of a person's heart, that person becomes neglectful of remembering Allah and is easily led to regard evil deeds as right (Quran 58:19).

As a result, various forms of evil and conflict arise—ranging from criminal activity to divisions among religions, ethnic groups, nations, and social groups. Each side believes itself to be most righteous and is quick to blame others without recognizing its own shortcomings. This situation demonstrates how Satan has succeeded in sowing discord among humanity.

Therefore, all of humanity is called upon to train themselves to recognize the unseen enemy "Satan" who whispers evil into the heart. Every desire or impulse that arises must first be scrutinized. If it leads to anger, resentment, envy, arrogance, lies, selfishness, or neglect of Allah, then that impulse must not be acted upon.

The way we view those who err must also be changed. Instead of merely judging the perpetrator, we should realize that people can fall victim to Satan's temptations. Just as when we see a child fall into a well, we should rescue them, not throw stones at them; or when we see a house on fire, we should extinguish it with water, not gasoline; likewise, when we see someone who has erred, made a mistake, or sinned, they should be helped through prayer and reminded to become aware and free themselves from Satan's influence, not insulted, shunned, or treated as an enemy. The more appropriate attitude is to pray for them, offer advice with compassion, and ask Allah to grant them the awareness to return to the right path.

Ultimately, true change begins with oneself. The greatest mistake is often not that we are quick to see others' shortcomings, but rather that we neglect to improve ourselves. Therefore, every person should prioritize self-improvement by continually training the ability to recognize and resist the unseen enemy "the devil" before attempting to correct others.

This principle affirms that humanity's true enemy is not fellow human beings, but Satan, who operates from within the human heart. Consequently, every negative impulse—such as anger, envy, and malice, must be filtered before acting on it, and one's attitude toward those who have erred should be one of assistance and prayer, not hostility or shunning.

3.4.3. Cultivating Faith in the Hereafter

Life in this world and the hereafter form an inseparable unity. Both must be viewed and lived in balance. Humans must not merely pursue worldly life while neglecting the hereafter, for success in the hereafter is determined by one's actions during life in this world.

The relationship between this world and the hereafter is likened to the peel and the flesh of a banana. The peel symbolizes life in this world, while the flesh symbolizes life in the hereafter. The two are inseparable, but the flesh is the primary goal. However, just as the peel covers the flesh, the busyness of this world often causes people to neglect preparing for the hereafter. The Qur'an also reminds us that people are only aware of the visible aspects of worldly life, while they remain heedless of the hereafter (Quran 30:7).

Because they are too focused on worldly matters, people often devote all their energy, time, and wealth solely to worldly interests. Yet when death comes, all material possessions will be left behind. The only provisions for the afterlife are righteous deeds—especially the sacrifice of wealth, energy, thought, and time for the benefit of the community. Regret after death is of no use, as described in Surah Al-Munafiqun, verse 10.

Therefore, every effort to meet worldly needs should also be accompanied by preparing provisions for the hereafter. Owning a home, a vehicle, clothing, and the necessities of life is natural, but a portion of one's sustenance should be channeled through charity—helping the poor and needy, orphans, education, healthcare, the development of public facilities, and various forms of benefit to society. In this way, one's wealth is not only beneficial in this world but also serves as provision for the Hereafter.

This article also serves as a reminder that the pleasures of this world are very small compared to the pleasures of the hereafter. This world is temporary and can end at any moment, whereas life in the hereafter is eternal. Therefore, people should not become so attached to worldly luxuries that they forget their ultimate purpose.

Furthermore, worship should not be understood merely as the performance of rituals. Faith in the hereafter must also be manifested through social compassion and a willingness to share with others as an investment in eternal life.

To help evaluate the quality of such faith, the concepts of Faith A, B, and C are introduced. Faith A describes someone who still uses most of their wealth for

worldly needs rather than for the afterlife; for example, if they earn Rp. 4,000 in a day, Rp. 3,000 goes toward worldly needs, and Rp. 1,000 toward the afterlife. Faith B indicates a balance between worldly and afterlife needs; if one earns Rp. 4,000 in a day, Rp. 2,000 goes toward worldly needs and Rp. 2,000 toward the afterlife. Meanwhile, Belief C describes someone who prioritizes provisions for the afterlife while still meeting worldly needs in moderation because they believe the afterlife is longer; if they earn Rp. 4,000 from their work in a day, they allocate Rp. 3,000 for the afterlife and Rp. 1,000 for worldly needs. This concept serves as a tool for self-reflection so that everyone can assess the extent to which their belief in the afterlife is reflected in how they manage their livelihood.

According to this article, a weak belief in the afterlife is one of the causes of behaviors such as corruption, greed, and indifference toward others. Conversely, if society holds a strong belief in the afterlife and cultivates the habit of sharing, social welfare, equity, and justice will be easier to achieve.

In the concluding section, the article urges the public to elect leaders who are trustworthy, of good moral character, and whose words and deeds are in harmony. Leaders should be evaluated based on their integrity, concern for the people, and alignment with religious values—not merely on the basis of popularity or public image. With a strong faith in Allah, a balanced focus on both this world and the hereafter, and good leadership, it is hoped that people can attain salvation and well-being in both this world and the hereafter.

3.5. The Relevance of SPMAA's Core Values to Children's Character Education in the Qur'an

Based on a thematic analysis of verses regarding children's character education and their contemporary interpretations, a significant relevance was found between the three core values of SPMAA and the principles of Qur'anic character education. A mapping of this relevance can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Relevance of SPMAA's Core Values to Children's Character Education in the Qur'an

SPMAA Core Values	**Reference Verses and Interpretations**	**Character Traits Developed in Children**	**Educational Relevance**
1. Getting to Know Allah Intimately and Fundamentally (*Ma'rifatullah*)	Surah Luqman: 13; Surah Qaf: 16—interpreted by Quraish Shihab (*Al-Mishbah*) as instilling an awareness of Tawhid from an early age	Religious character, awareness of Allah's watchfulness (*muraqabah*), feeling immersed and enveloped by Allah, honesty, trustworthiness, humility	The foundation of *character building* in the Qur'an and the first core value of SPMAA both place the knowledge of Allah as the starting point for shaping children's moral character, not merely the rote memorization of rituals
2. Training Oneself to Recognize the	Surah Yasin: 60; Surah Al-A'raf: 27—interpreted by	The ability to recognize Satan as the enemy, to	In line with Qur'anic character education that emphasizes

Unseen Enemy (*Mujahadah An-Nafs*)	Wahbah az-Zuhaili (*Al-Munir*) as education in moral vigilance (*tahzir*)	view all humans as brothers and sisters, to exercise self-control, to refrain from readily blaming others, to practice empathy, and to engage in introspective self-reflection (*muhasabah*)	*riyadhah an-nafs*; children are trained to recognize negative impulses within themselves before judging their social environment
3. Instilling Belief in the Hereafter	QS. Al-Qashash: 77; QS. Ar-Rum: 7—interpreted by Hamka (*Al-Azhar*) as a balance between the worldly and the hereafter	Focused on the hereafter, generosity (charity), simplicity, a world-and-hereafter life orientation, and social responsibility	The SPMAA A-B-C Faith Concept serves as an operational model for the balance between this world and the hereafter taught in the Qur'an; it is relevant to be internalized as character education in generosity from an early age

Source: Author's analysis (2026)

Table 1 shows that the first core value of SPMAA—namely, "Getting to Know Allah Intimately and Fundamentally"—is the operational equivalent of the principle of instilling tauhid, which exegetes have identified as the primary foundation of children's character education. The second value, "Training Oneself to Recognize the Unseen Enemy," aligns with the concept *of mujahadah an-nafs* (self-discipline), which is central to fostering a reflective rather than reactive character in children, while also cultivating an attitude of compassion toward fellow human beings as brothers and sisters, rather than judging those who err. As for the third value, "Instilling Belief in the Hereafter," it serves as a concrete manifestation of the principle of balance between worldly and otherworldly concerns emphasized in contemporary exegesis, which SPMAA translates into practical application through the "Iman A, B, C" concept as an instrument for fostering a charitable character from an early age.

Thus, it can be concluded that SPMAA's core values are not merely an institutional philosophical legacy but a contextual and local representation of the principles of children's character education enshrined in the Qur'an. In practical terms, the children's educational curriculum at the SPMAA Islamic boarding school can be developed by explicitly integrating these three core values into thematic exegesis lessons, so that students not only memorize institutional values but also fully understand their Qur'anic roots.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes three main points. First, the Qur'an contains a comprehensive concept of children's character education, as illustrated in the advice of Luqman the Wise (Quran 31:12–19), which encompasses the

dimensions of tawhid, *birrul walidain*, worship, patience, and social ethics. Second, contemporary exegetes such as M. Quraish Shihab, Wahbah az-Zuhaili, and Hamka agree that tawhid serves as the primary foundation of character education, which then develops integrally toward the formation of social ethics and an awareness of the balance between worldly and afterlife existence. Third, the core values of SPMAA—namely, Getting to Know Allah Intimately and Fundamentally, Training Oneself to Recognize the Unseen Enemy, and Cultivating Faith in the Hereafter—have substantial relevance to the principles of children's character education outlined in the Qur'an, and can thus serve as an operational model for contextual Qur'anic character education within Islamic boarding schools and the broader community, thereby making education in Indonesia more dignified, noble, and outstanding in both this world and the hereafter.

This study has limitations because it focuses only on three contemporary exegetical works and has not directly incorporated empirical data from educational practices within the SPMAA Islamic boarding school. Therefore, further field *research* is recommended to empirically examine the effectiveness of implementing SPMAA's core values in the practice of children's character education.

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