



Formation of Socially Caring Character and Humble Behavior Through Arabic Language Learning in Islamic High Schools

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Abstract

The growing disconnect between academic achievement and students' moral-social development has become a major challenge in contemporary Islamic education, particularly as character formation often remains detached from everyday classroom practice. Although Arabic language learning contains ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions rooted in Islamic traditions, it is still predominantly positioned as a technical-linguistic subject emphasizing grammar and language proficiency. This study aims to examine how Arabic language learning functions as a pedagogical medium for fostering social awareness and humble behavior among students in Islamic secondary schools. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this study involved 45 informants consisting of school leaders, Arabic language teachers, and students. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, and then analyzed using the interactive model of Huberman and Saldaña. The findings reveal that social awareness and humility are cultivated through value-oriented classroom interaction, reflective dialogue, collaborative learning, teachers' role modeling, and school-based social activities integrated into Arabic language instruction. Ultimately, this study reconceptualizes Arabic language learning as a morally mediated social practice and positions Arabic teachers as moral agents shaping students' ethical dispositions within Islamic educational contexts.

A. Introduction

The crisis of contemporary education no longer lies merely in the failure of schools to transmit knowledge, but increasingly in their inability to cultivate socially responsible, ethically reflective, and emotionally grounded individuals. Despite significant advances in educational access, curriculum reform, and learning technologies, schools across diverse contexts continue to face rising problems of intolerance, bullying, declining empathy, and weakened social solidarity among students (Chaves & Gerosa, 2021; Weiss & Cohen, 2019). These developments reveal a troubling paradox: educational systems are becoming more successful in producing academically competent learners while simultaneously struggling to nurture moral judgment, social responsibility, and character development (Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022; Ediyanto, 2023; Susanto, 2024). This contradiction becomes particularly visible within religious educational institutions, where moral and spiritual values are institutionally emphasized yet frequently fail to materialize in students' everyday behavior.

In many educational systems, cognitive performance continues to dominate pedagogical priorities, while affective dimensions such as empathy, social awareness, humility, and ethical responsibility remain marginalized within classroom practice (Abbott et al., 2019; Suryani & Muslim, 2024; Bharanitharan et al., 2021). Consequently, education risks producing academically capable students who are socially fragmented and morally fragile. This condition has become a major challenge for Islamic educational institutions. Although character education formally occupies a central place within Islamic schooling, its implementation often remains trapped within symbolic and normative discourse rather than transformative pedagogical practice (Thoma et al., 2021; Ediyanto, 2023; Putri et al., 2025). Research in Islamic education has largely focused on curriculum achievement and cognitive development, while the moral and relational dimensions of learning continue to receive limited systematic attention (Asrori et al., 2025; Febrini et al., 2024; Sugara & Perdana, 2021).

The increasing incidence of aggressive behavior, disciplinary violations, and disrespect toward teachers among students reflects not only broader social change but also the pedagogical limitations of schools in integrating ethical values into everyday learning experiences (Basuki & Febriansyah, 2020; Arif et al., 2021). The rapid expansion of digital culture has further intensified this problem, fostering reactive communication patterns and reducing empathic engagement in social interactions (Lili Sholehuddin

Badri & Ahmed Abdul Malik, 2024; Albashrawi et al., 2022). Moral education can therefore no longer rely solely on declarative instruction; it requires pedagogical practices capable of embedding ethical values within lived social interaction.

Within this context, Arabic language learning occupies a distinctive yet often underutilized position in Islamic education. Arabic is not merely a linguistic instrument but also the primary medium through which Islamic ethical, spiritual, and humanitarian traditions are transmitted (Ayish, 1998, 2003; Baharun et al., 2026). Embedded within Arabic texts, dialogues, and expressions are moral vocabularies that shape understandings of compassion, humility, solidarity, and social responsibility. However, Arabic language instruction in many Islamic senior high schools remains predominantly oriented toward technical linguistic outcomes such as vocabulary mastery, grammatical accuracy, and examination performance (Almelhes, 2024; Riaz et al., 2023). As a result, the moral potential of Arabic language education is often overshadowed by its instrumental and cognitive functions, creating a disconnect between the ethical meanings embedded within the language and the ways it is taught in schools.

Interdisciplinary scholarship offers a different perspective on this issue. Moral psychology argues that values are developed through repeated interaction, social modeling, and reflective engagement rather than through abstract instruction alone (Thoma et al., 2021; Bharanitharan et al., 2021). Sociolinguistic perspectives conceptualize language as a socially situated practice through which identities, moral orientations, and social meanings are continuously negotiated (Gee & Gee, 2007; Muh Hizbul Muflihin et al., 2024). Likewise, social interactionist traditions rooted in constructivist thought position teacher–student interaction as a central mechanism mediating moral and social development (Piaget, 1952; Skinner, 1957; Setiadi et al., 2024; Asy'arie et al., 2024). Collectively, these perspectives suggest that language learning should be understood not merely as a technical process of linguistic acquisition but also as a socially and morally mediated educational practice.

Research on Arabic language education has expanded considerably in areas such as curriculum development, instructional innovation, learner motivation, and language achievement (Almelhes, 2024; Fradana, 2023; Chronaki et al., 2022; Razali & Mamat, 2024; Sauri et al., 2023). Studies on character education in Islamic schools also have examined moral formation through religious instruction, institutional culture, and school-wide programs (Basuki & Febriansyah, 2020; Daulay et al., 2023; Miswari

et al., 2021). More recent scholarship has also begun exploring the relationship between language learning and character formation (Satori et al., 2025; Susanto, 2024; Riaz et al., 2023). These studies have contributed important insights into both Arabic language pedagogy and character education.

Despite the growing scholarship on Arabic language education and character development, limited attention has been given to how moral values are mediated and internalized through everyday Arabic language classroom interactions. While theoretical perspectives consistently recognize language as a socially and morally mediated practice (Gee & Gee, 2007; Thoma et al., 2021; Bharanitharan et al., 2021), empirical studies continue to approach Arabic language learning primarily as a technical-linguistic activity focused on instructional effectiveness and academic achievement (Almelhes, 2024; Fradana, 2023; Razali & Mamat, 2024). Similarly, research on character education tends to locate moral formation within religious subjects and institutional programs rather than within subject-specific classroom practices (Basuki & Febriansyah, 2020; Daulay et al., 2023; Miswari et al., 2021). Although recent studies have explored the relationship between language learning and character formation (Satori et al., 2025; Susanto, 2024; Riaz et al., 2023), they pay limited attention to the pedagogical mechanisms through which values such as social awareness and humility are internalized. Consequently, little is known about how Arabic language teachers function as moral agents in mediating value formation through classroom interaction and communicative practice.

To address this gap, this study contributes to current discussions on character education, Islamic pedagogy, and value-based language learning by showing how moral formation can be embedded within Arabic language learning rather than being confined to religious instruction or institutional character-building programs. By integrating perspectives from moral psychology, sociolinguistics, and social interactionism, the study offers a broader analytical framework for understanding value internalization as a subject-specific pedagogical process in Islamic education. The novelty of this study lies in its reconceptualization of Arabic language classrooms as spaces of moral mediation. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine Arabic learning through linguistic achievement, curriculum development, instructional innovation, or generalized character outcomes, this study positions Arabic language teachers not merely as language instructors but as active moral agents who facilitate the development of social awareness and humility through communicative interaction, classroom discourse, and relational pedagogy.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how Arabic language learning functions as a pedagogical medium for fostering social awareness and humility among students in Islamic high schools. Specifically, it explores how moral and social values are mediated and internalized through classroom interaction, communicative practice, teacher guidance, and value-oriented learning experiences within Arabic language education.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative field research design using a case study approach to examine how social awareness and humble behavior are fostered through Arabic language learning in Islamic high schools (Gammelgaard, 2017). A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand moral and social value formation as a contextual and interactional process embedded within everyday educational practices rather than as a measurable behavioral outcome. The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Ulum, Sukun, Malang City, East Java, Indonesia, because this institution represents an Islamic educational setting in which Arabic language learning is systematically integrated into both academic and social activities, making it an information-rich context for examining value-oriented pedagogical practices.

Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in Arabic language instruction and student character development. They included the head of the madrasah, the deputy head of curriculum, the vice principal for student affairs, two Arabic language teachers, and 40 students who participated in focus group discussions (FGDs). In total, the study involved 45 informants representing institutional leadership, instructional actors, and students actively engaged in Arabic language learning activities.

Table 1. Informant identity distribution

No.	Initials	Position	Education Level
1.	AMZ	Head of Madrasah	Master's (S2)
2.	VNH-b	Deputy Head of Curriculum	Master's (S2)
3.	RM	Vice Principal for Student Affairs	Bachelor's (S1)
4.	ASF	Arabic Language Teacher	Bachelor's (S1)
5.	FS	Arabic Language Teacher	Bachelor's (S1)
6.	X1	Student (FGD)	MA
7.	X2	Student (FGD)	MA
	Total		45 informants

Data were collected over a four-month period from January to April 2024 through four complementary techniques to ensure contextual depth and data richness. First, structured classroom observations were conducted to document Arabic language teaching practices, classroom interaction patterns, and students' behavioral expressions related to social awareness and humility. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with school leaders and Arabic language teachers to explore their perspectives regarding the integration of moral and social values within Arabic language instruction. Third, document analysis was carried out on lesson plans, institutional programs, and instructional materials to identify how moral values were formally embedded within learning activities. Fourth, two sequential FGDs with students were conducted to capture students' experiences and perceptions regarding social interaction, empathy, and humble behavior within Arabic learning contexts. The first FGD, conducted in the first week of January 2024, focused on students' social interaction patterns and peer relationships within the school environment, while the second FGD, conducted in the last week of March 2024, explored the development of social awareness and humble behavior through Arabic language learning activities.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles et al., (2013), consisting of data reduction, thematic data display, and conclusion drawing conducted iteratively throughout the research process. Interview transcripts, observation notes, FGD results, and documents were continuously coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes related to the formation of social awareness and humility through Arabic language learning. Analytical consistency was strengthened through repeated verification of the data corpus and triangulation across observations, interviews, FGDs, and documents.

This study adhered strictly to research ethics principles throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, all participants provided voluntary informed consent, while consent involving student participants was additionally obtained from their guardians in coordination with the madrasah leadership. Participants' identities were anonymized using coded initials, all data were securely stored and accessed exclusively by the research team, and the findings were reported solely for academic purposes.

C. Results and Discussion

Character education in schools is frequently implemented through an instructional model in which teachers are positioned as primary transmitters of values,

while students are expected to internalize these values through guided learning experiences. In the context of Arabic language learning, this orientation becomes visible across multiple stages of instruction, including classroom interaction, reflective engagement with social values, and the evaluation of students' learning behavior. Arabic language learning therefore functions not merely as a process of acquiring linguistic competence, but as an educational space in which moral and social values are continuously negotiated and practiced. Through teacher-led pedagogical strategies, Arabic instruction at the madrasah level facilitates the development of empathy, social awareness, and humble behavior as integral components of students' character formation.

1. Results

a. Overview of the findings

This study found that Arabic language learning at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Ulum functions not only as a medium for developing linguistic competence but also as a pedagogical space for cultivating social awareness and humble behavior among students. The findings demonstrate that the integration of moral values into Arabic language instruction occurs through classroom interactions, teacher role modeling, collaborative learning practices, and school-based social activities. Empirical data further reveal that the formation of students' social character is achieved not through separate moral instruction programs, but through the continuous integration of ethical values within everyday learning practices. Two major dimensions emerged consistently from the data: the strengthening of students' social awareness and the development of humble behavior through Arabic language learning activities.

To provide an overview of the main findings before presenting more detailed empirical evidence, the pedagogical practices identified during the research process and their corresponding value outcomes are summarized below.

Table 2. Summary of pedagogical practices and value outcomes in Arabic language learning

Core finding	Pedagogical practice by Arabic teachers	Where it occurs	Content integration in Arabic learning	Evidence source
Social awareness is cultivated through collaborative learning	Value-based discussion on cooperation, caring, honesty, shared responsibility	Classroom and daily interactions	Values embedded in texts, dialogues, reflective tasks	Interview AMZ, 2024; Observation; Interview-FGD X1, 2024

Core finding	Pedagogical practice by Arabic teachers	Where it occurs	Content integration in Arabic learning	Evidence source
Empathy and perspective-taking are strengthened	Dialogue, stories, moral materials in Arabic to understand others' feelings and solve problems collectively	Classroom	Moral themes linked to Arabic reading and conversation	Interview ASF, 2024
Social responsibility is reinforced through action	Charity, fundraising, community-oriented activities led or encouraged by Arabic teachers	School environment	Activities connected to moral messaging in Arabic learning	Interview RM, 2024
Environmental awareness becomes part of caring character	Waste management and cleanliness routines linked to Arabic learning materials	School environment	Environmental themes inserted into Arabic texts/conversations	Interview-FGD X2, 2024
Humility develops through feedback culture	Constructive feedback practices, training students to accept criticism positively	Classroom	Feedback tied to task quality in Arabic assignments	Interview FS, 2024
Humility is reinforced through peer support	Preventing arrogance among high achievers, encouraging helping peers, mutual respect	Classroom and peer interaction	Moral guidance embedded in Arabic learning dynamics	Interview ASF, 2024; Interview AMZ, 2024
Solidarity and respect are built through group work	Structured group assignments with shared roles and responsibilities, cooperative completion	Classroom and home support	Collaboration embedded in Arabic task completion	Interview ASF, 2024; Interview FS, 2024

Table 2 demonstrates that moral and social values are integrated directly into Arabic language learning through dialogues, collaborative activities, reflective tasks, feedback practices, and classroom interaction rather than being delivered as separate moral instruction. The findings further indicate that Arabic language teachers play a central role in mediating the formation of social awareness and humility through communicative and value-oriented pedagogical practices.

b. Building students' social awareness through arabic language learning

One of the dominant findings of this study is that Arabic language learning contributes significantly to the development of students' social awareness through interactional and collaborative pedagogical practices. Classroom observations showed



that Arabic teachers consistently integrated themes of empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and caring into learning activities. Rather than focusing exclusively on grammatical mastery and vocabulary acquisition, teachers linked Arabic learning materials with students' everyday social experiences.

This integration was explained by the head of the madrasah, who emphasized that Arabic language instruction was intentionally designed to connect linguistic learning with social values and collective responsibility:

...In general, our efforts to integrate social awareness into Arabic language learning are carried out by developing lesson materials based on everyday values. Furthermore, we also use a discussion approach to share experiences as a way to address student problems, both inside and outside the classroom. This strategy helps build collaboration, reduces individualism, and strengthens a sense of community. (Interview with AMZ, 2024)

The interview findings were consistent with classroom observations showing that students were frequently encouraged to discuss social issues, cooperate in group activities, and engage in reflective dialogue during Arabic learning sessions. This emphasis on discussion-based interaction allowed students to develop communication skills while simultaneously strengthening their sensitivity toward others.

Students also described Arabic language learning as a space where moral values were practiced through teacher guidance and classroom interactions. One participant in the focus group discussion explained that the learning process helped students understand compassion, honesty, and care for others through both instructional materials and teachers' exemplary behavior:

...My Arabic teacher helped me understand the learning that emphasizes humility through exemplary behavior and discussions related to moral values. Through this process, I learned about compassion, honesty, and caring for others. I also realized the importance of the teacher's role in guiding and providing concrete examples to build humility and social awareness, which are reflected in Arabic language learning. (Interview-FGD X1, 2024)

The findings further reveal that the cultivation of social awareness extended beyond classroom interaction into broader institutional practices. According to the deputy head of curriculum, Arabic language learning is connected to extracurricular activities, school regulations, and daily behavioral guidance that encourage students to practice social responsibility in everyday situations:

...Students are not only taught Islamic values conceptually but are also guided to apply them in their daily lives, such as showing respect to teachers and obeying school

rules. Social awareness is fostered through learning activities as well as extracurricular and religious discussion programs, which serve as concrete efforts to cultivate a caring character. (Interview with VNH-b, 2024)

Observation data also showed that Arabic language learning frequently incorporated dialogue materials and narrative texts emphasizing cooperation, helping behavior, and social empathy. Teachers regularly encouraged students to discuss moral dilemmas, understand different perspectives, and solve problems collectively. One Arabic language teacher explained this approach as follows:

...As educators, we must have a strong sense of empathy. Through dialogue, stories, and moral materials in Arabic, students learn to understand others' perspectives and solve problems together. They are encouraged to feel and understand others' emotions, which fosters caring, tolerance, and mutual respect. (Interview with ASF, 2024)

The development of social awareness was also reinforced through school-based social activities facilitated by Arabic teachers. Interviews with the vice principal for student affairs revealed that teachers encouraged students to participate in charity work, fundraising programs, and community-oriented activities as part of character development:

...Arabic teachers actively encourage students to get involved in social activities such as charity work and fundraising. When a classmate faces difficulties, students are guided to show concern. Teachers also involve students in social projects relevant to community needs, helping them develop social responsibility and environmental sensitivity. (Interview with RM, 2024)

Another important finding concerns the integration of environmental awareness into Arabic language learning. Observation and FGD data showed that environmental themes were incorporated into Arabic reading materials, classroom conversations, and school cleanliness activities. One student explained that environmental responsibility became part of their learning experience through practical activities connected to Arabic instruction:

...The Arabic teachers have helped shape our awareness of environmental preservation. Activities such as cooperative waste management are linked to Arabic reading texts and conversations on environmental themes. This approach builds awareness of cleanliness and sustainability within the school environment. (Interview-FGD X2, 2024)

Collaborative learning further strengthened students' social awareness through shared responsibility and peer interaction. Classroom observations demonstrated that

group assignments and social projects required students to cooperate while practicing Arabic communication skills. One teacher described this approach as follows:

...We teach students to collaborate through social activities such as fundraising or volunteering. These activities teach them to help others while strengthening their communication skills in Arabic. Through cooperation, students develop a strong social awareness and make positive contributions to their environment. (Interview with ASF, 2024)

Overall, the findings indicate that social awareness was cultivated through the consistent integration of moral themes, collaborative interaction, and social participation within Arabic language learning activities. Students were not only exposed to moral concepts theoretically but were also encouraged to practice empathy, cooperation, and responsibility through everyday educational interaction.

c. Fostering humble behavior through Arabic language learning

In addition to strengthening social awareness, the findings also demonstrate that Arabic language learning contributed to the development of humble behavior among students. Classroom observations showed that teachers consistently created communicative and humanistic learning environments that encouraged openness, mutual respect, and the acceptance of feedback. Humility was cultivated not through direct moral lecturing but through interactional practices emphasizing self-reflection and respectful communication.

One Arabic language teacher explained that humility is developed by encouraging students to accept criticism positively and view feedback as part of the learning process:

...We build humility by encouraging students to accept criticism openly. Students are guided not to feel offended by feedback but to see it as an opportunity for improvement. We also create a learning environment where students give constructive feedback to each other, helping them develop an open and positive attitude toward criticism. (Interview with FS, 2024)

Observation data confirmed that teachers frequently used reflective feedback during classroom interactions and encouraged students to appreciate different opinions during group discussion activities. The findings further indicate that teachers attempted to prevent arrogance among academically successful students by promoting peer support and collective learning. One teacher stated:

...When students achieve high academic results, we guide them not to feel superior. Instead, they are encouraged to help classmates who struggle. We emphasize respect, appreciation of differences, and generosity so that students grow into humble individuals. (Interview with ASF, 2024)

This practice was institutionally reinforced within the broader school environment. According to the head of the madrasah, students with stronger Arabic competence were encouraged to assist their peers rather than demonstrate superiority:

"...Arabic teachers do not only teach language skills but also develop students' character. Students learn to respect and appreciate one another, which creates a harmonious and respectful classroom atmosphere." (Interview with AMZ, 2024)

Collaborative assignments also played an important role in developing humility. Teachers organized group activities requiring equal participation and shared responsibility among students. One teacher explained that cooperation within Arabic assignments helped students learn responsibility and solidarity while simultaneously strengthening communication between the school and parents:

...When students work together on Arabic assignments, they learn responsibility and cooperation. Communication with parents is also important to support students' learning and character development. (Interview with ASF, 2024)

Similarly, reflective discussion activities encouraged students to appreciate others' contributions and respect differing viewpoints during classroom interaction. This process was described by one teacher as follows:

"...Through group assignments and discussions, students learn to exchange ideas and respect each other's contributions. This process helps build humility and mutual support among students." (Interview with FS, 2024)

The findings indicate that humble behavior emerged through continuous interactional practices emphasizing openness, constructive feedback, peer support, and collaborative participation. Students gradually learned to recognize their own limitations while maintaining respect and empathy toward others within both classroom and institutional interactions. Observation, interview, and focus group data consistently showed that humility was cultivated through everyday learning experiences rather than through direct moral instruction. Students were encouraged to listen to differing opinions, accept criticism constructively, assist peers experiencing academic difficulties, and participate actively in cooperative learning activities. These recurring practices created opportunities for students to develop self-awareness, mutual respect, and a willingness to value the contributions of others as part of the learning process.

To summarize the overall process of character formation identified in this study, the relationship between pedagogical practices, classroom interaction, and the development of social awareness and humility is illustrated below.

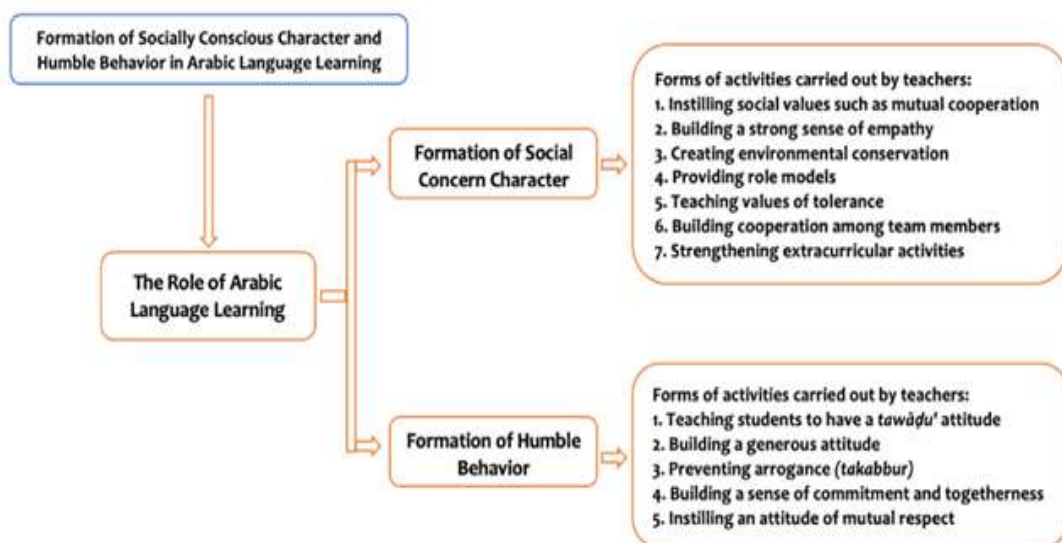


Figure 1. The process of forming social character and humble behavior in students

Figure 1 illustrates that the formation of social awareness and humble behavior emerged through the integration of value-oriented pedagogical practices within Arabic language learning. Through dialogue, collaborative assignments, reflective feedback, and teachers' exemplary behavior, students engaged repeatedly with values related to empathy, cooperation, respect, and social responsibility. These findings demonstrate that Arabic language learning operated not merely as linguistic instruction but as a sustained pedagogical process through which moral and social character were continuously shaped within everyday educational interactions.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Arabic language learning in Islamic schools cannot be reduced to a purely linguistic or technical instructional activity. Instead, it functions as a socially mediated pedagogical practice through which moral awareness, empathy, humility, and relational responsibility are continuously cultivated within everyday educational interactions. This finding is significant because it challenges the dominant tendency in Islamic education to position character formation as a separate institutional agenda disconnected from subject-specific pedagogy. The empirical evidence generated in this study indicates that the formation of social awareness and humble behavior emerges precisely through the interactional dynamics

of language learning itself, particularly when teachers intentionally integrate reflective dialogue, collaborative participation, and value-oriented communication into classroom practice. In this context, Arabic language learning becomes not merely a medium for transmitting linguistic competence, but a pedagogical arena where ethical dispositions are socially negotiated and gradually internalized.

This insight is important academically because much of the existing literature on character education within Islamic schools continues to conceptualize moral formation primarily as the responsibility of religious instruction or institutional habituation programs (Basuki & Febriansyah, 2020; Daulay et al., 2023; Miswari et al., 2021; Pakpahan & Habibah, 2021). Such approaches implicitly separate moral education from subject-based pedagogy, as though ethical formation occurs independently from everyday classroom interactions. The findings of this study challenge this dichotomy by demonstrating that moral formation is deeply embedded within pedagogical processes themselves. Arabic language learning becomes morally effective not because teachers explicitly preach ethical doctrines, but because values such as empathy, cooperation, humility, and respect are repeatedly practiced through interaction, communication, and collaborative learning. This explains why students in this study did not merely describe moral values conceptually, but articulated them through lived classroom experiences, peer interactions, and relational engagement with teachers.

The significance of this finding also lies in its contribution to broader debates concerning the social function of language education. Existing studies on Arabic language pedagogy have largely concentrated on curriculum design, instructional innovation, language acquisition, and learner motivation (Almelhes, 2024; Fradana, 2023; Chronaki et al., 2022; Razali & Mamat, 2024; Sauri et al., 2023). While these studies provide important insights into pedagogical effectiveness, they frequently approach Arabic learning as a technical-linguistic process detached from the moral and social meanings embedded within language itself. This study demonstrates that such a separation is pedagogically problematic, particularly within Islamic educational contexts where Arabic carries ethical, spiritual, and social significance beyond communicative function alone. The findings suggest that linguistic interaction cannot be understood independently from the moral worlds encoded within it. Arabic dialogues, narratives, reflective tasks, and classroom conversations become pedagogically meaningful precisely because they operate simultaneously as communicative and ethical practices.

These findings also call into question the longstanding tendency to evaluate Arabic language learning primarily through linguistic achievement, grammatical mastery, and academic performance. While such outcomes remain important, they capture only part of the educational function of language learning. The present study demonstrates that Arabic language classrooms simultaneously serve social and ethical functions through which students learn to negotiate relationships, develop empathy, and construct moral understanding. Consequently, the effectiveness of Arabic language education may need to be reconsidered beyond purely cognitive and linguistic indicators.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings extend social interactionist and constructivist understandings of learning in ways insufficiently explored in previous studies. Amirudin et al., (2025) and Satori et al., (2025) emphasize that learning is fundamentally shaped through social mediation and interaction. However, these discussions largely remain within the level of general pedagogical principles without examining how moral consciousness is specifically mediated through subject-based linguistic interactions. The present study demonstrates that moral development occurs not outside language learning but through language learning itself. Students develop empathy, social awareness, and humility because they repeatedly engage in communicative situations requiring cooperation, reflection, mutual respect, and sensitivity toward others. This finding expands the implications of Gee & Gee's (2007) sociolinguistic perspective by illustrating that language classrooms are not neutral instructional spaces but socially situated environments where identities, ethical orientations, and social relationships are continuously negotiated.

This finding also carries important implications for how character education is conceptualized within Islamic schooling. Much of the existing discourse continues to frame character formation as the outcome of religious instruction, moral habituation programs, or institutional culture operating alongside academic learning (Basuki & Febriansyah, 2020; Daulay et al., 2023; Miswari et al., 2021). The present study suggests a different perspective by demonstrating that character development may emerge through the pedagogical processes of subject learning itself. In this regard, social awareness and humility are not external values added to classroom activities but are cultivated through the communicative interactions, collaborative participation, and relational experiences that constitute everyday Arabic language learning.

More importantly, this study demonstrates that the moral potential of Arabic language learning emerges through pedagogical mediation rather than through linguistic

content alone. Qur'anic expressions, ethical narratives, and Arabic moral vocabulary do not automatically produce character formation merely because students encounter them textually (Rekan et al., 2025; Hayatuddin & Siswanto, 2025). Their transformative potential becomes pedagogically operative only when teachers mobilize them through reflective interaction, dialogical engagement, and collaborative practice. This explains why teacher interaction emerged as a central mechanism in the formation of students' social awareness and humble behavior (Ediyanto, 2023; Sofiani et al., 2025). Teachers in this study did not function solely as transmitters of linguistic knowledge but as moral mediators who shaped classroom ethics through feedback culture, peer collaboration, social participation, and relational guidance. This finding reveals a dimension that remains underdeveloped in the literature on Arabic language education, namely the positioning of Arabic teachers as moral agents within value-based pedagogy.

The role of teachers as relational architects of classroom ethics becomes especially visible in the formation of humility among students. The findings indicate that humility was cultivated not through authoritarian discipline or moral lecturing, but through communicative openness, constructive feedback, and collaborative participation. Students learned to accept criticism, appreciate others' contributions, and avoid academic arrogance because teachers consistently normalized respectful interactions within the learning environment. This finding carries important implications because humility in educational contexts is often treated abstractly as an individual moral trait rather than as a socially cultivated disposition. The findings of this study instead suggest that humility develops relationally through repeated interactional experiences where students are encouraged to recognize personal limitations while maintaining respect toward others. In this sense, humility is not merely an internal attitude but a socially constructed ethical orientation emerging from pedagogical interactions.

The findings also demonstrate that social awareness and humility were reinforced beyond classroom instruction through broader institutional ecology. Arabic language learning was connected with extracurricular activities, charity programs, environmental initiatives, and parental communication, indicating that character formation functioned through interconnected social environments rather than isolated classroom events (Rekan et al., 2025; Mohd Yusoff et al., 2022). This institutional dimension is important because it reveals that moral development in Islamic education cannot be sustained solely through curriculum content (Rekan et al., 2025; Sofiani et al.,

2025). Instead, values become meaningful when pedagogical interactions, school culture, and social participation operate coherently. This finding aligns with broader discussions on ethical communication and affective curriculum design that emphasize the relational and ecological dimensions of education (Alwi et al., 2020; Syukran et al., 2024; Mohammed, 2023). However, the present study extends these discussions by demonstrating concretely how such ethical ecology operates within Arabic language learning contexts.

The broader significance of these findings cannot be separated from contemporary global educational discourse. International educational frameworks such as UNESCO's transformative education agenda and the OECD Learning Compass 2030, increasingly emphasize empathy, collaboration, ethical responsibility, and social-emotional competence as essential dimensions of future education (Carney, 2022; OECD, 2019). Yet these frameworks frequently remain positioned at the level of policy abstraction without sufficiently explaining how such competencies are pedagogically cultivated in everyday classroom practice. This study contributes an important empirical dimension to these discussions by showing how social and emotional competencies are operationalized through value-integrated language learning in an Islamic educational context (Thoma et al., 2021; Bharanitharan et al., 2021). The findings therefore provide methodological and pedagogical relevance not only for Indonesia but also for Muslim-majority educational contexts across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East where Arabic language instruction remains institutionally central yet pedagogically underutilized as a medium for character formation (Ayish, 1998, 2003; Riaz et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2023).

The findings additionally contribute to ongoing debates on the future of religious education in increasingly fragmented social environments. Contemporary educational systems often face tensions between cognitive achievement, technological acceleration, and declining relational ethics. The findings of this study suggest that language education, when pedagogically designed as a relational and value-oriented practice, offers an important counterbalance to the growing depersonalization of learning processes. Arabic language learning in this context becomes not only a site for acquiring communicative competence but also a social space where students learn how to cooperate, empathize, reflect, and ethically position themselves within collective life (Gee & Gee, 2007; Rekan et al., 2025; Muh Hizbul Muflihah et al., 2024).

This demonstrates that subject-specific pedagogy possesses transformative social potential when ethical values are meaningfully embedded within classroom interactions rather than detached into isolated moral instruction programs (Satori et al., 2025; Thoma et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study was conducted within a single Islamic senior high school context, which means that the findings remain contextually situated and may not automatically represent all models of Arabic language learning across different institutional environments. In addition, the study focused primarily on interactional and pedagogical processes observed within a limited research period, meaning that the long-term sustainability of students' moral and social development was not fully examined. The findings therefore should not be interpreted as universally generalizable conclusions, but rather as contextually grounded insights into how value-oriented Arabic language learning operates within a specific educational setting. These limitations, however, open important opportunities for future research to explore comparative institutional contexts, longitudinal patterns of character development, and the broader transferability of values-integrated language pedagogy across different Islamic educational systems.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Arabic language learning in Islamic secondary schools possesses transformative pedagogical potential that extends far beyond the development of linguistic competence. The findings reveal that the formation of students' social awareness and humble behavior at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Ulum emerges through the continuous integration of moral values within everyday classroom interactions, reflective dialogue, collaborative learning, and teachers' exemplary conduct. Rather than functioning as an isolated moral program detached from academic instruction, character formation becomes embedded within the pedagogical architecture of Arabic language learning itself. In this context, Arabic language instruction operates simultaneously as a communicative, relational, and ethical practice through which students learn not only language skills but also empathy, cooperation, responsibility, humility, and social sensitivity.

The findings contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic education by challenging the long-standing separation between language pedagogy and character

education. This study reconceptualizes Arabic language teachers not merely as transmitters of linguistic knowledge, but as moral agents who actively mediate ethical formation through classroom interaction and relational pedagogy. Such a repositioning expands current understandings of value-based education by demonstrating that moral development is not solely produced through formal religious instruction or institutional habituation but can also emerge through subject-specific learning practices when pedagogically designed in a value-oriented manner. The study therefore contributes theoretically to discussions on sociolinguistics, moral psychology, and social interactionist learning by showing that language learning functions as a socially mediated process of ethical internalization within Islamic educational settings.

Practically, the findings suggest important implications for curriculum development, teacher education, and institutional policy in Islamic schools. Arabic language instruction should no longer be viewed exclusively through the lens of technical language acquisition, but as a strategic pedagogical space for cultivating social and emotional competencies increasingly emphasized in contemporary educational discourse. In broader educational contexts, the findings also offer relevance for international discussions concerning values-based education, particularly within non-Western and religious educational environments where moral formation remains a central institutional objective. The study demonstrates that ethical and social competencies can be systematically integrated into subject-specific pedagogy without requiring separate curricular structures or additional institutional programs.

Nevertheless, this study remains contextually situated within a single Islamic secondary school environment and was conducted within a limited research period. Consequently, the findings should be understood as contextually grounded rather than universally generalizable. Future research is therefore needed to examine whether the processes of value formation identified in this study remain sustainable, measurable, and transferable across different Islamic educational institutions, cultural settings, and longitudinal contexts.

Ultimately, this study is that language learning is never socially neutral. When pedagogically mobilized as a morally mediated social practice, Arabic language learning becomes a formative educational space in which students learn not only how to communicate, but also how to relate to others, reflect ethically, and position themselves responsibly within social life.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently without any commercial, financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could influence the interpretation, analysis, or presentation of the findings reported in this study.

Declaration of Generative AI

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used solely to support language refinement, grammar checking, and academic writing improvement during the manuscript preparation process. All conceptual development, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and final academic decisions remained entirely the responsibility of the authors. The authors have carefully reviewed and validated the entire content of the manuscript to ensure its accuracy, originality, and academic integrity.

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