

The Concept of Morality, Ihsan and Ta'dib in the Formation of Islamic Character and Malay Culture

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Abstract:

This study explores the fundamental concepts of morality (*akhlaq*), excellence (*ihsan*), and educational refinement (*ta'dib*) as integral elements in the development of Islamic character and their significant influence on the formation of Malay cultural identity. Employing a qualitative approach with descriptive and historical methods, data were collected through an extensive literature review related to Islamic concepts and Malay cultural traditions. The findings reveal that *akhlaq*, *ihsan*, and *ta'dib* play a vital role in shaping Islamic character within Malay society. *Akhlaq* serves as the foundation of religious and cultural education, fostering relationships between individuals, God, and others. *Ihsan* promotes an awareness of God's presence in all actions, manifesting in social values such as mutual cooperation and respect. *Ta'dib* functions as an educational framework that instills profound moral and spiritual values, nurturing individuals of noble character. The application of these concepts strengthens Malay culture by aligning it with Islamic principles and preserving its noble values. In conclusion, reinforcing Islamic character through *akhlaq*, *ihsan*, and *ta'dib* is essential for sustaining and advancing Malay culture, ensuring that future generations remain grounded in Islamic values.

Abstrak:

Kajian ini membahas konsep dasar akhlak (moralitas), ihsan (kesempurnaan dalam beribadah dan berbuat baik), dan ta'dib (pendidikan adab) sebagai elemen penting dalam pembentukan karakter Islami serta pengaruhnya yang signifikan terhadap pembentukan budaya Melayu. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif dan historis, mengumpulkan data melalui studi pustaka yang berkaitan dengan konsep Islam dan budaya Melayu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Akhlak, Ihsan, dan Ta'dib memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk karakter Islami pada masyarakat Melayu. Akhlak menjadi dasar pendidikan agama dan budaya, menghubungkan individu dengan Tuhan dan sesama. Ihsan mengajarkan kesadaran akan kehadiran Tuhan dalam setiap tindakan, yang tercermin dalam nilai-nilai sosial seperti gotong royong dan saling menghormati. Ta'dib berfungsi sebagai pendekatan pendidikan yang menanamkan nilai moral dan spiritual tinggi, membentuk individu berakhlak mulia. Penerapan konsep-konsep ini memperkuat budaya Melayu yang berbasis pada ajaran Islam, menjaga nilai-nilai luhur dalam masyarakat. penguatan karakter Islami melalui Akhlak, Ihsan, dan Ta'dib sangat penting dalam mempertahankan dan mengembangkan budaya Melayu, memastikan generasi mendatang tetap berpegang pada prinsip-prinsip Islam.

Keywords:

Morality, Ihsan, Ta'dib, Islamic Character, Malay Culture, Islamic Education

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Introduction

In Islam, character formation is not limited to personal acts of worship; it also encompasses social relationships, morality, and the ethics of daily life. This formation is achieved through the understanding and practice of Islamic teachings, particularly the concepts of *akhlaq* (morality), *ihsan* (spiritual excellence), and *ta'dib* (educational refinement). Character is a fundamental aspect of personal identity, and in Islam, good character is cultivated through these teachings, which serve not only as spiritual guidance but also as social and cultural pillars in the lives of Muslims. The Muslim-majority Malay community embodies a strong cultural tradition deeply influenced by Islamic values. This study aims to explore how the concepts of *akhlaq*, *ihsan*, and *ta'dib* contribute to the formation of Islamic character as integrated into Malay culture, while also addressing contemporary challenges in preserving these values. Morality has long been the primary goal of the educational process in Islam, as it is seen as the foundation for human balance and a key determinant of other pedagogical outcomes. As such, Islam emphasizes education as a vital agent in the moral development of children, consistently prioritizing the cultivation of character as the core objective of learning (Syahputra, Shittu, & Ul Ain, 2024).

Ihsan represents the highest level of worship, where a Muslim seeks to act with full awareness of Allah's presence. It emphasizes sincerity in performing good deeds toward both God and fellow humans. *Ta'dib*, on the other hand, is an educational philosophy that fosters moral development and personal integrity. Within Islamic education, *ta'dib* goes beyond the transmission of knowledge to focus on shaping students' character and ethical conduct. In Malay society, character education plays a vital role in preserving the noble values passed down through generations. These values are embedded in various cultural expressions, including customary taboos (*pantang larang*), traditional sayings (*seloko*), oral traditions, and local performing arts. Recent studies affirm the role of Malay wisdom in shaping character among youth. For example, Rahmah, Mursalim, and Murniati (2024) found that the tradition of *pantang larang* fosters honesty, politeness, discipline, and religiosity in children. Similarly, Waluyo, Mualifah, and Destriana (2023) reported that incorporating Riau Malay culture into elementary education enhances students' moral, Islamic, and global character. In a different context, Salsabilah, Aryanti, and Putri (2023) showed that traditions such as *Ruwahan* and *Bubur Suro* in Palembang promote tolerance and social harmony.

Despite these valuable insights, most existing studies remain descriptive and region-specific. They often lack comparative analysis or fail to develop systematic frameworks for integrating local character values into broader educational models. This study addresses these gaps by comparing character values across various Malay communities – specifically in Riau, Jambi, and West Kalimantan – and by examining strategies for implementing these values in both formal and informal education. Ultimately, the research seeks to propose a culturally grounded model for character development that is rooted in Islamic principles and responsive to the cultural richness of Malay society.

This research holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the scholarly discourse on character education by offering a comparative and culturally contextualized perspective grounded in Islamic and Malay traditions. Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing culturally responsive character education programs that align with national identity. In doing so, this study not only promotes moral development but also supports cultural preservation and fosters social cohesion within a multicultural society. Within the context of Malay culture, Islamic values embedded in *akhlaq*, *ihsan*, and *ta'dib* are highly relevant for shaping individual personality and societal character. Malay culture, with its rich tapestry of traditions and customs, is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Therefore, reinforcing Islamic character in Malay communities is essential for sustaining the noble values inherent in the culture. In everyday life, the application of these concepts encourages a more harmonious, respectful, and forward-looking society.

Research Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach, employing a literature review as the primary method for data collection and analysis (Sugiyono, 2013). The data analyzed in this research were obtained from a range of credible sources, including peer-reviewed academic journals, scholarly books, reputable online databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and SINTA-indexed publications, as well as official government documents, magazines, and other relevant literature concerning national and Islamic education. The data were qualitative in nature, primarily descriptive and conceptual, and related to the values of *akhlaq* (morality), *ihsan*, and *ta'dib* in the formation of Islamic character and Malay cultural identity. The sources included both primary texts – such as the Qur'an, ḥadīth, classical works of Islamic scholars, and traditional Malay manuscripts – and secondary materials, including academic journals, books, and previous relevant studies. All data were collected through a systematic literature review and were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify, interpret, and categorize key themes and concepts.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Morality in Islam and Malay Culture

Etymologically, *akhlaq* (morality) is derived from the Arabic word *khuluq*, which means ethics or character. According to al-Ghazali, morality is an ingrained disposition of the soul that enables a person to act spontaneously and effortlessly, without the need for

deliberate thought (Al-Ghazali, 2004). In Islamic thought, morality is rooted in divine revelation, distinguishing it from ethical systems derived purely from human reasoning. Morality in Islam encompasses various domains, including a person's relationship with Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), oneself, one's family, society, nature, and the nation. The foundations of Islamic morality are based on the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, human intellect, conscience, and prevailing social norms (Ahmad Sahnan, 2018). Moral education in Islam is inseparable from religious education. What is considered good is determined by religious teachings, and so is what is deemed bad. Accordingly, moral values and priorities within Islamic societies are directly shaped by religious principles. A Muslim's faith is not considered complete without the cultivation of good character (Munirah, Amiruddin, & Mumtahanah, 2023). Morality reflects the harmony between an individual's spiritual and social dimensions.

In Malay culture, morality is deeply respected and forms a core part of its identity. Expressions such as *adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah* (customs are rooted in Sharia, and Sharia is based on the Qur'an) reflect the integration between cultural traditions and Islamic teachings. Moral values in Malay culture are embedded in traditional proverbs, sayings (*petatah-petitih*), and oral expressions passed down through generations. For example, the proverb "*orang berbudi kita berbahasa, orang memberi kita merasa*" highlights the value of mutual respect and ethical reciprocity. Likewise, "*di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung*" teaches the importance of honoring local customs and values wherever one resides. These values are present in family relationships, community life, and customary systems that emphasize politeness, social responsibility, and honesty. On an individual level, morality shapes Islamic character through virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, humility, and patience. A person of noble character maintains balance between their vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationship with others. Such character does not emerge instantly but develops through a long-term process involving family education, habitual practice, and spiritual-social experiences.

For the Malay people, morality is not solely a religious construct; it is also a crucial aspect of cultural identity. Moral values such as honoring parents (*birr al-wālidayn*), practicing mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and safeguarding personal and family dignity (*hifz al-'ird*) are expressed through traditions, rituals, oral literature, and educational practices in *surau* and *madrasah*. The Islamic character of Malay culture is evident in local customs such as the commemoration of 'Ashura', *Nisf Sha'bān*, *Makan Besamo*, and *Ziarah Kubur* across the river in Jambi City, which reflect a unique synthesis of religious, cultural, and moral values (Muhammad Rafli, 2023). These findings are supported by qualitative data from ethnographic studies, cultural documentation, and prior research conducted in Jambi, Riau, and Palembang, indicating that such traditions serve as effective mediums for transmitting the values of *akhlaq*, *ihsan*, and *ta'dīb* across generations.

Additionally, classical Malay literary works such as *Gurindam Dua Belas* by Raja Ali Haji contain moral teachings aligned with Islamic principles, including the importance of keeping one's word, showing devotion to parents, and avoiding immoral behavior. Islamic

values have also been integrated into Malay customary legal norms, reflecting a synthesis between Islamic law and local traditions. This integration has led to the development of a legal-cultural system that embodies Islamic values without necessitating the formal establishment of an Islamic state (Yusnita, Yuswalina, Zuraida, & Safitri, 2023). In Malay culture, moral education is a central concern. Many families instill values such as etiquette, responsibility, and a love for learning from an early age through informal education at home. The *surau* serves not only as a space for worship but also as a center for moral instruction, where Islamic teachings are conveyed in harmony with local cultural traditions.

Thus, morality plays a central role in shaping Islamic character, both at the individual and societal levels. Within the context of Malay society, moral values have been intricately woven into cultural traditions, literary expressions, and customary legal norms, forming a distinctive identity grounded in Islamic principles. Although modern challenges pose threats to the continuity of these values, with appropriate educational frameworks and strong community support, the transmission and preservation of moral values can be sustained for future generations.

The Concept of Ihsan and Its Implementation

Ihsan In Islamic thought, *iḥsan* represents the highest level of faith and moral conduct. It is defined in the well-known ḥadīth of Jibril as “to worship Allah as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then indeed He sees you” (Muslim, No. 8). This concept emphasizes spiritual consciousness (*muaqabah*) and sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*) not only in worship but in all aspects of daily life. *Iḥsan* requires the internalization of divine presence, leading to acts performed with compassion, integrity, and full awareness. It transcends formal rituals and cultivates personal responsibility, humility, and moral excellence. As the spiritual dimension of Islam, *iḥsān* perfects one’s relationship with Allah and with fellow human beings.

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Yusof and Ahmad (2019) assert that *ihsan* is closely associated with psychological well-being, noting that awareness of Allah's presence fosters emotional maturity and self-awareness in Muslims. This dimension of *ihsan* bridges theology and psychology, making it applicable across personal, social, and educational spheres. Rohman (2020) further emphasizes the philosophical significance of *ihsan*, describing it as a foundational principle in Islamic character education that cultivates ethical reasoning and structured spiritual discipline. In the Malay context, the integration of *ihsan* reinforces not only the internalization of religious teachings but also promotes social harmony, empathy, and collective responsibility. Fitri and Arifin (2023) observe that *ihsan* forms the ethical core of Malay educational practices, particularly in values such as humility (*tawāḍuʿ*), sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*), and respect (*taʿẓīm*) for others. Teachers, parents, and community leaders play a crucial role in fostering *ihsan*-oriented values through exemplary behavior and culturally embedded educational approaches. The transmission of these values often occurs informally yet remains deeply influential, rooted in everyday practices and reinforced through communal rituals and oral traditions. This highlights *ihsan* as both a personal spiritual aspiration and a collective moral framework (Hanifiyah & Mansuri, 2022). As a lived value, *ihsan* shapes a holistic Islamic identity that bridges spiritual devotion with social responsibility.

In Malay culture, *ihsan*-based values are embedded in Islamic customs and traditions. These values are reflected in various aspects of daily life that emphasize politeness, filial piety, and mutual aid. The Malay community is widely recognized for its strong emphasis on social virtues such as cooperation, mutual respect, and interethnic tolerance. Research in Sukabangun, Palembang, demonstrates that social interaction between Malay and non-Malay Muslim communities takes place harmoniously through activities such as collective environmental cleanups and mutual assistance during disasters (Boty, 2017). Similarly, studies on intercultural communication between Malay and Chinese communities in South Sumatra highlight how the values of *ihsan* foster mutual understanding and respect for cultural and religious differences (Pratama, 2024). Within Malay families, *ihsan* is particularly emphasized in parent-child relationships. Children are taught to honor and serve their parents through respectful behavior, obedience, and academic or personal achievement, which are viewed as expressions of love, reverence, and devotion.

The Concept of Ta'dib and Islamic Character Education

Ta'dīb is derived from the word *adab*, meaning manners or ethics. According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *ta'dīb* is an educational concept that encompasses the introduction and internalization of proper conduct, beneficial knowledge, and wisdom (Al-Attas, 1993). It is not limited to the transmission of knowledge but also emphasizes the cultivation of moral and spiritual values in learners. Through *ta'dīb*, education becomes a holistic process aimed at shaping the character and soul of the individual in accordance with Islamic ideals.

In the Malay tradition, informal education systems – such as *halaqah*, *surau* gatherings, and Qur'anic recitation circles – have played a central role in instilling the

values of *ta'dīb*. These informal settings are complemented by formal institutions such as *madrasahs* and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which serve as key sites for the transmission of Islamic knowledge and cultural heritage (Zakaria, 2006). The educational process in these settings places strong emphasis on ethics in learning, proper manners toward teachers (*adab al-ʿālim wa al-mutaʿallim*), and a deep sense of social responsibility. Within the context of Islamic education, *ta'dīb* plays a crucial role in shaping children's character, both within the family unit and in the wider Malay community. The concept of *ta'dīb* is not merely about instructing; it involves a nurturing approach characterized by compassion, exemplary behavior, and sincerity in teaching. Through *ta'dīb*, parents and educators do not simply transmit religious knowledge – they guide children to become individuals with noble character, a sense of humility, and an abiding awareness of their relationship with God (Yanti & Hayani, 2023).

In Malay families, *ta'dīb* is embedded in everyday life. Parents serve as primary role models for their children. When parents demonstrate good manners, speak gently, and observe religious practices consistently, children naturally emulate their behavior. Through warm and intentional family interactions, children internalize values such as honesty, patience, and respect (Hidayat, Mansyur, & Abidin, 2023). For instance, parents often invite their children to perform congregational prayers at home or engage in communal Qur'an reading. Such practices instill the importance of worship and integrate divine awareness into daily routines. These habits extend into the community, where children are taught to help others, maintain cleanliness, and participate in religious and social activities. The concept of *iḥsān*, which emphasizes mindfulness of God in every action, is closely intertwined with *ta'dīb* in the daily life of the Malay Muslim community. Known for values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and mutual respect, Malay social life reflects the integration of *iḥsān* through educational and cultural practices. As conveyed in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "Indeed, I was sent to perfect noble character," (Boli, Nurhakim, Khozin, 2024), the cultivation of moral excellence is a central aim of Islamic education. Moral education through *ta'dīb* not only imparts religious and ethical values but also facilitates their practice within the family and broader society. In this way, Islamic moral teachings are effectively preserved and transmitted across generations, ensuring their relevance and application in contemporary contexts.

Integration of the Concepts of Morality, *iḥsān*, and *Ta'dīb* in the Formation of Islamic Character and Malay Culture

In Malay culture, the concepts of *akhlāq* (morality), *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence), and *ta'dīb* (educational refinement) complement one another in shaping a strong Islamic character. The Malay community has adopted Islam not only as a religion but as a core component of cultural identity, making Islamic principles deeply embedded in Malay customs and daily life. As noted by Fitri, Sumiyati, Laili, Ramadhani, Salsabila, Alfattah, and Darwis (2024), the integration of Islamic values into Malay cultural practices has facilitated a seamless synthesis between faith and tradition. *Akhlāq* provides the ethical foundation, *iḥsān* refines the spiritual dimension, and *ta'dīb* serves as the harmonizing element through educational processes. Together, these concepts create a holistic

framework for character formation. As highlighted by Madona Agustin Sari (2024), *ta'dīb* represents an educational ideal that encompasses the full spectrum of knowledge (*ilm*), teaching (*ta'lim*), and moral cultivation. Its ultimate aim is to develop virtuous human beings – those whose behavior reflects both intellectual understanding and spiritual integrity. According to Hanifiyah and Mansuri (2022), *ta'dīb* has positive and significant implications for the development of students' character, influencing their manners, thoughts, and inner states in alignment with Islamic teachings.

This integration is evident in the Malay customary system and social norms, which are deeply informed by Islamic values. Core principles such as honoring one's parents (*birr al-wālidayn*), cultivating spiritual mindfulness through prayer and remembrance (*dhikr*), and upholding courteous communication are embedded in everyday interactions. A well-known traditional proverb - "*lebih baik kehilangan anak daripada kehilangan adat*" ("it is better to lose a child than to lose tradition") – illustrates the central role of ancestral customs, which have become intertwined with Islamic teachings (Madjid & Nurcholish, 2000). This expression reflects the deep integration of religion and culture within the Malay worldview. Scholars affirm that such integration enhances moral resilience, strengthens cultural identity, and promotes communal harmony (Aziz & Ibrahim, 2021). Social practices such as ritual feasts (*kendūri*), ancestral grave visits (*ziyarah al-qubūr*), and organized religious study sessions (*majlis al-ta'lim*) exemplify the fusion of Islamic spirituality with Malay tradition. These practices serve not only as expressions of religious devotion but also as mechanisms for the intergenerational transmission of moral values and collective commitment to spiritual and ethical excellence (Zainuddin & Hamzah, 2019).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of the concepts of *akhlaq* (morality), *ihsān*, and *ta'dīb* plays a foundational role in shaping Islamic character within Malay culture. These three concepts operate synergistically as religious, moral, and educational pillars that influence individual conduct, family values, and community identity. Their integration into Malay customs and traditions strengthens the spiritual and cultural fabric of society, while also facilitating the intergenerational transmission of noble values. However, the scope of this study is limited by its theoretical orientation and reliance on literature-based analysis. The absence of empirical data constrains its ability to capture the diverse manifestations and contextual interpretations of Islamic values across the broader Malay world. As a result, the applicability of the findings to real-life educational and social contexts remains limited. Future research is recommended to incorporate ethnographic or field-based methodologies to examine how *akhlaq*, *ihsān*, and *ta'dīb* are practically implemented in contemporary Malay education systems, family life, and communal practices. Comparative studies across different regions or generations may also offer richer insights into how these moral frameworks evolve within varying sociocultural contexts and respond to modern challenges.

Ethical Statement

The research was conducted with a strong commitment to ethical responsibility, ensuring the dignity, rights, and safety of all participants were fully respected. All relevant ethical approvals and institutional permissions were obtained prior to data collection. Throughout the study, procedures aligned with both institutional ethics protocols and internationally recognized standards, ensuring transparency and integrity in every phase of the research.

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CRedit Author Statement

- **Author 1:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original draft preparation.
- **Author 2:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – Reviewing and Editing.
- **Author 3:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

Data Availability

The authors declare that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

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