



Tafsir Al-Misbah as a Pedagogical Framework for Qur'anic Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab can function as a coherent pedagogical framework for Qur'anic character education in Islamic boarding schools. Existing research has largely focused on identifying Qur'anic values within tafsir texts, yet has not explained the pedagogical mechanisms through which these values are internalized by students. Addressing this gap, the study investigates how tafsir is integrated into curricular, non-curricular, and cultural practices in two pesantren with different institutional orientations. A qualitative multiple case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of tafsir-based learning activities. The data were analyzed using thematic coding and cross-case comparison following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model. The findings show three key results. First, Tafsir Al-Misbah is integrated through a structured three-dimensional model that includes reflective and project-based learning in the curriculum, value habituation through halaqah and muhasabah, and institutional culture building through symbolic Qur'anic practices. Second, this integration consistently cultivates core Qur'anic character values such as honesty, patience, responsibility, social empathy, and sincerity. Third, teachers play a central role as moral exemplars and reflective facilitators who translate tafsir into lived practices. These findings imply that tafsir can operate not only as a source of religious knowledge but also as a pedagogical system that links interpretation, reflection, and behavioral transformation. The study concludes by recommending the adoption of the three-dimensional integration model to strengthen character education in pesantren and other faith-based institutions.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana Tafsir Al-Misbah karya M. Quraish Shihab dapat berfungsi sebagai kerangka pedagogis yang koheren bagi pendidikan karakter Qur'ani di pesantren. Studi sebelumnya umumnya berfokus pada identifikasi nilai Qur'ani dalam teks tafsir, tetapi belum menjelaskan mekanisme pedagogis yang memungkinkan nilai tersebut terinternalisasi dalam diri santri. Untuk mengisi kesenjangan ini, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana tafsir diintegrasikan ke dalam praktik kurikuler, non-kurikuler, dan kultural pada dua pesantren dengan orientasi institusional yang berbeda. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus ganda dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi aktivitas pembelajaran berbasis tafsir. Analisis data dilakukan melalui pengodean tematik dan perbandingan lintas kasus menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, Tafsir Al-Misbah diintegrasikan melalui model tiga dimensi yang mencakup pembelajaran reflektif dan berbasis proyek dalam kurikulum, pembiasaan nilai melalui halaqah dan

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muhasabah, serta pembentukan budaya institusional melalui praktik simbolik Qur'ani. Kedua, integrasi ini secara konsisten menumbuhkan nilai karakter Qur'ani seperti kejujuran, kesabaran, tanggung jawab, empati sosial, dan keikhlasan. Ketiga, guru berperan sentral sebagai teladan moral dan fasilitator refleksi yang menerjemahkan tafsir menjadi praktik kehidupan sehari-hari. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tafsir dapat berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai sumber pengetahuan keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai sistem pedagogis yang menghubungkan penafsiran, refleksi, dan transformasi perilaku. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan model integrasi tiga dimensi untuk memperkuat pendidikan karakter di pesantren dan lembaga pendidikan berbasis agama lainnya.

Introduction

Rapid social change and technological advancement have introduced new challenges to Islamic education, particularly in cultivating religious values and character among younger generations (Nurhayati & Rosadi, 2022). Although formal education continues to advance, moral decline among youth remains evident in rising cases of violence, dishonesty, substance abuse, and weakened social ethics (Amirudin, Suhartini, Basri, & Rohimah, 2025). These trends suggest that cognitive achievement alone is insufficient; the formation of religious character must become a central priority within Islamic education. Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), as long-standing institutions of Islamic learning, hold a strategic position in shaping students' religious character through teaching traditions and value-based habituation (Lailiyah & Mukhlisin, 2023). The pace of social transformation, the penetration of digital technology, and the fragmentation of moral authority further intensify the challenges faced by contemporary Islamic education (D'Agostino & Asadullah, 2025). Studies consistently show that improved cognitive outcomes do not necessarily translate into the internalization of moral and religious values, as reflected in increasing dishonesty, declining empathy, and weakened learning ethics among students (Memon, Abdalla, & Chown, 2024). These findings indicate that religious education focused solely on knowledge transmission is inadequate for fostering value-based character formation (Wijaya Mulya, Aditomo, & Suryani, 2022).

In Indonesia, pesantren have historically served as key institutions for religious character education through classical text learning, exemplary conduct, and value habituation (Mustofa, Mas'ud, & Elizabeth, 2023). However, recent developments reveal that pesantren also face similar challenges, as religious teachings are often understood normatively and textually without sufficient pedagogical mechanisms to connect them to students' lived experiences. As a result, Qur'anic values risk remaining abstract moral discourse rather than functioning as ethical frameworks that shape concrete behavior (Sanderse, 2024).

Tafsir constitutes one of the primary sources of value education in pesantren. Yet the core issue lies not in the richness of tafsir content but in the limited pedagogical implementation of tafsir within character education. Many tafsir learning practices emphasize cognitive comprehension of verses without a systematic pedagogical framework to transform interpretation into attitudes and actions (Sarroub & Schroeder, 2023). This raises a fundamental question: how can tafsir function as an effective pedagogical instrument for character formation rather than merely a source of religious knowledge (Abdalla, 2025). *Tafsir Al-Misbah* by M. Quraish Shihab offers significant potential in this regard due to its contextual, linguistic, and reflective approach that bridges Qur'anic texts with contemporary social realities. Although previous studies have

examined character values within Tafsir Al-Misbah or used it as a normative reference for character education, they generally remain at the level of thematic analysis and do not explain the pedagogical mechanisms through which tafsir is integrated into educational practice or how such processes lead to character transformation (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025).

Methodologically, research on tafsir-based character education in pesantren is dominated by conceptual or single-case descriptive studies. Comparative case study designs that allow cross-institutional analysis are rarely employed, limiting the ability to explain variations in tafsir integration strategies and their implications for students' character formation (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). Consequently, conceptual and methodological gaps persist, as existing approaches do not sufficiently explain how tafsir operates as a comprehensive pedagogical system in Qur'anic character education.

Based on this critical synthesis, the present study addresses the following research puzzle: why and how the rich Qur'anic values articulated in modern tafsir have not been consistently transformed into students' religious character, and what pedagogical framework enables tafsir to function effectively as an instrument of character education in pesantren. This question remains insufficiently answered in previous tafsir tarbawi and faith-based character education research. This study advances the literature in two key ways. Conceptually, it moves beyond identifying character values in tafsir by formulating a three-dimensional integration model, curricular, non-curricular, and cultural, that explains the pedagogical pathways through which tafsir informs character formation. Methodologically, it employs a multiple case study design to analyze similarities and differences in tafsir implementation across pesantren with distinct institutional orientations, generating richer and more analytical insights (Yin, 2020).

The analytical framework draws on two theoretical lenses: character education theory (Peterson & Kristjánsson, 2024) and contextual Qur'anic pedagogy, which emphasizes reflection, value internalization, and the linkage between text and social reality (Sarroub & Schroeder, 2023). Integrating these lenses enables an analysis that addresses not only what Qur'anic character values are taught but also how and why these values become internalized in students.

Method

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate the pedagogical integration of Tafsir Al-Misbah in two Islamic boarding schools with distinct institutional orientations. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore participants' lived experiences and the social meanings embedded in educational practices, particularly within culturally situated learning environments (Creswell & Poth, 2020). The multiple case study design was analytically explanatory rather than merely descriptive, allowing the study to examine how and why tafsir functions as a pedagogical framework for Qur'anic character formation across different pesantren contexts (Priya, 2021). This design also facilitated analytic replication, where cross-case comparisons strengthen the credibility of emerging patterns (Amrullah & Mutholingah, 2025).

The two research sites, namely Darussalam Sungai Salak and Darul Rahman Tempuling, were selected purposively to represent the spectrum of traditional-reflective and modern-dialogical pesantren models within the Malay-Islamic region of Indragiri Hilir. This region is known for its strong pesantren tradition and its emphasis on character formation through residential religious life (Mtisi, 2022). Darussalam was positioned as a traditional-reflective pesantren emphasizing halaqah, adab, and value habituation, while

Darul Rahman represented a modern-dialogical model integrating thematic discussions, digital media, and Qur’anic character projects. Controlling for regional context, tafsir source (Tafsir Al-Misbah), and unit of analysis (tafsir integration), while allowing variation in pedagogical approaches, enabled a robust comparative analysis (Nabella et al., 2022).

A total of 18 participants were recruited, consisting of pesantren leaders, tafsir and Islamic education teachers, tahfidz teachers, and senior students. This number aligns with the final informant table and resolves previous discrepancies (N. Nurhayati, Latif, & Anwar, 2024). Participant characteristics such as teaching experience (3–18 years), tafsir teaching experience (2–15 years), and students’ length of dormitory residence (1–5 years) were considered relevant because they influence exposure to tafsir practices and the depth of value internalization (Murtado & Kurniawan, 2025). Inclusion criteria required teachers to have at least three years of teaching experience and prior use of Tafsir Al-Misbah, and students to have lived in the dormitory for at least one year. Sampling adequacy was assessed using the principle of information power, given the narrow research focus, specific context, and depth of triangulated data (Ahmed, 2025).

Data collection involved semi-structured in-depth interviews, moderate participant observation, and documentation of tafsir learning and dormitory activities (Siahaya, Manuputy, & Ambarita, 2025). Fieldwork was conducted from 18–23 July 2025 and included 18 interview sessions lasting 30–75 minutes and 12 observation sessions across tafsir classes, halaqah, evening muhasabah, and dormitory routines, totaling approximately 36 hours of observation. Interview and observation protocols were refined through piloting to sharpen mechanistic questions related to behavioral change, new routines after halaqah, and the role of teachers and peers in reinforcing values (Saputri, Susilo, & Risni, 2025). Secondary data included syllabi, lesson plans, student reflection journals, halaqah schedules, value boards, activity reports, and photo and video documentation, totaling 25–30 documents. These materials supported triangulation, verification of interview and observation findings, and reconstruction of tafsir implementation timelines. Table 1 below presents the details of the participants.

Table 1. Details of Informants

Category of Respondents	Darussalam Salak	Sungai Darul Tempuling	Rahman, Total
Caretaker / Head of the Islamic Boarding School	1 person	1 person	2 persons
Tafsir / Islamic Education Teachers	2 persons	2 persons	4 persons
Tahfidz / Qur’anic Morality Teachers	1 person	1 person	2 persons
Senior Students (Grade XI–XII of Islamic Senior High School)	5 persons	5 persons	10 persons
Total Respondents	9 persons	9 persons	18 persons

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Age and Gender

Category	Average Age(Years)	Percentage of Male	Percentage of Female
Caretakers & Teachers	38.5	75%	25%
Senior Students	17.2	60%	40%

Data analysis followed the interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). Coding proceeded through initial and focused coding, codebook development, theme construction, within-case matrices, and cross-case comparison. Each theme required support from multiple data sources to ensure analytic validity (Erciyas, 2020). Behavioral indicators were categorized into routine markers (discipline, honesty, and adab), incidents (responses to violations), and reflective outputs (journals, vlogs, and muhasabah), enabling empirical identification of value internalization (Nurhayati, Dina Liana, 2025).

The researcher acted as a moderate participant observer, minimizing reactivity through early habituation and repeated observations. Field notes were written in descriptive, reflective, and mechanistic memo formats within 12 hours of each activity and stored securely. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, audit trails, and thick description of pesantren contexts (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2020). Ethical procedures followed social research standards (N. Nurhayati et al., 2024). Students aged 16–18 provided assent, institutional consent was obtained from pesantren authorities, and confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms and encrypted data storage.

Results and Discussion

Overview of the Research Sites

The study was conducted in two pesantren in Indragiri Hilir, Darussalam, Sungai Salak, and Darul Rahman Tempuling, each representing distinct pedagogical orientations yet sharing a common commitment to *tafaqquh fid-din*. Both institutions position the Qur'an as the foundation of character education and employ Tafsir Al-Misbah as a key interpretive resource to contextualize Qur'anic values within students' daily lives. This shared orientation provides a stable basis for comparing how tafsir is operationalized pedagogically across different institutional models.

Darussalam represents a traditional-reflective pesantren model that integrates Tafsir Al-Misbah into its salafiyah learning tradition. Weekly halaqah sessions combine classical texts with contemporary tafsir to encourage moral reflection, particularly on values such as honesty, responsibility, and humility. These sessions are reinforced through daily routines—cleaning duties, congregational prayers, and Friday muhasabah—that function as a hidden curriculum for habituating Qur'anic character. The integration of tafsir with lived dormitory practices demonstrates how reflective interpretation becomes a mechanism for internalizing values.

In contrast, Darul Rahman adopts a modern-dialogical model that blends national curriculum standards with pesantren traditions. Tafsir Al-Misbah is taught through thematic discussions, digital media, and interactive learning activities, including video lectures by Quraish Shihab and student-led presentations. This approach encourages

students to connect Qur’anic messages with contemporary issues such as tolerance, environmental ethics, and social responsibility. The use of digital tools and thematic forums cultivates critical thinking and value reasoning, positioning tafsir as a bridge between scripture and modern social realities.

Across both pesantren, Tafsir Al-Misbah is integrated through structured learning patterns that combine formal classes, weekly halaqah, reflection forums, and individual assignments. These activities consistently emphasize the moral implications of Qur’anic verses. For example, QS. Al-Mujadalah:11 is used in both institutions to teach learning etiquette and respect within academic assemblies, though the modes of expression differ, with written reflections at Darussalam and reflective vlogs at Darul Rahman. Such practices illustrate how tafsir becomes a pedagogical tool for translating textual meaning into behavioral expectations.

In both pesantrens, tafsir classes are conducted regularly and systematically, taking place in both formal classroom settings and informal halaqah sessions. The following table illustrates a comparison of tafsir learning patterns at the two institutions:

Table 3. Frequency and Learning Patterns

Type of Activity	Frequency / Week	/Darussalam Sungai Salak	Darul Rahman Tempuling
Formal Tafsir Class (Curricular)	2 times	Tafsir of <i>Juz ‘Amma</i> and moral-themed materials	Tafsir of social and Qur’anic thematic topics
Weekly Tafsir Halaqah	1 time	Study of Tafsir Al-Misbah and Tafsir Jalalain	Digital thematic study through Quraish Shihab’s video lectures
Student Discussion / Reflection Forum	1 time	Discussion on the meaning of verses and manners (<i>adab</i>)	Discussion on social values and religious moderation
Individual Reflection Assignment	1 time	“Verse Reflection of the Day” Journal	Mini project: Qur’anic Character Project
<i>Muhasabah</i> & Qur’anic Short Sermon (<i>Kultum</i>)	2 times	Evaluation of manners and worship	Evaluation of social ethics and leadership

Teachers play a central role in mediating the pedagogical use of Tafsir Al-Misbah. At Darussalam, teachers act as spiritual mentors who guide students through reflective interpretation and moral introspection. At Darul Rahman, teachers function as dialogical facilitators who encourage students to articulate personal interpretations and relate them to social contexts. Despite these differences, teachers in both settings serve as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*) who model Qur’anic values and support students in applying tafsir-derived insights to their daily conduct.

The Integration of Tafsir Al-Misbah

a. Curricular Dimension (Integration of Values in Formal Learning)

Based on the observations, Tafsir Al-Misbah serves as a primary and supplementary source in the subjects of Qur’anic Exegesis (Tafsir) and Qur’anic Ethics (Akhlaq Qur’ani) at both pesantren. At Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sungai Salak, this tafsir is used alongside Tafsir Jalalain and Tafsir Al-Maraghi to broaden students’ perspectives.

Teachers assign students to read specific sections of Tafsir Al-Misbah and write reflections on the verses they find most relevant to their daily behavior.

One observed example occurred when the teacher discussed QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11 about the virtue of knowledge and manners. The teacher explained the verse contextually, emphasizing that the nobility of knowledge is achieved not only through mastery of materials but also through respect for teachers and peers. Students were then asked to write a reflective journal titled “Respecting Teachers in Daily Life,” describing their personal experiences and plans for self-improvement.

A tafsir teacher at Darussalam explained in an interview:

“We teach students that tafsir is not merely an explanation of verses but a guide for conduct. When they understand manners toward teachers, that itself is part of understanding tafsir.” (Ust. H, Tafsir Teacher at Darussalam, July 20, 2025)

Meanwhile, at Darul Rahman Islamic Boarding School in Tempuling, curricular implementation is more interactive and digital-based. Teachers use the digital version of Tafsir Al-Misbah for Reflective Qur’anic Learning, where students read tafsir using tablets or Google Classroom and then discuss it in small groups. Students are tasked with creating mini-projects that connect the theme of a verse with real social actions—for instance, linking the concept of trust (*amanah*) to a “*Punctual Santri Project*” promoting time discipline in the pesantren environment. Documentation indicates that this approach cultivates reflective and applied learning habits. Students not only understand the Qur’anic meanings cognitively but also express Qur’anic values in real behavior, aligning with the Reflective Qur’anic Learning model. (Rahmawati, Irsyad, Qonaah, & Mahmudah, 2023), which directs tafsir learning toward self-reflection and behavioral transformation.

b. Non-Curricular Dimension (Internalization of Values in Social and Spiritual Activities)

The non-curricular dimension includes activities outside formal classes that serve as a medium for internalizing Qur’anic character values through habituation and moral reinforcement. Based on observations, both pesantren conduct structured and continuous non-curricular tafsir-based activities. At Darussalam, a weekly thematic tafsir halaqah is held every Thursday night, led by senior teachers. The themes are drawn from Tafsir Al-Misbah, focusing on moral values such as patience, honesty, and responsibility. Each student is given the opportunity to interpret a verse related to their personal experiences, after which the teacher provides moral guidance based on the tafsir.

One student stated in an interview:

“We often discuss verses about patience and honesty. If a friend gets angry or cheats, the ustadz immediately reminds us of those verses. It feels like the verses come alive in the dormitory.” (11th Grade Student, Darussalam, July 21, 2025)

This statement illustrates that Qur’anic values derived from tafsir are not only taught but brought to life in students’ social dynamics. This supports the observation that tafsir learning functions as a moral compass within the pesantren, where violations or conflicts are resolved by referring to Qur’anic principles. At Darul Rahman, the main non-curricular activity is the Friday Night Qur’anic Muhasabah. During this activity, students read a selected verse from Tafsir Al-Misbah related to a behavior they wish to improve. For instance, if the weekly theme is “Discipline and Trustworthiness,” they study QS. As-Saff [61]: 3 about the prohibition of saying what one does not practice.

Students then write short reflections on how they plan to improve their behavior. Teachers act only as facilitators, guiding students to find the personal meaning of the

verse. This approach exemplifies reflective character education, where Qur'anic values are instilled through repetition, habituation, and spiritual awareness. (Sholehuddin, Sopiah, Khobir, & Jaeni, 2022). Additionally, a Qur'anic Sharing Night is held every two weeks, where students deliver short sermons (kultum) based on selected verses from Tafsir Al-Misbah, followed by group discussions. Documentation in the form of photos and videos shows that this activity nurtures a culture of speaking with wisdom, listening with manners, and mutual counsel in truth.

c. Cultural Dimension (Formation of a Qur'anic Culture in the Pesantren Environment)

Culturally, the implementation of Tafsir Al-Misbah has shaped a Qur'anic and reflective pesantren culture. At Darul Rahman, the leadership designates a weekly character theme derived directly from Tafsir Al-Misbah. Themes such as sincerity (QS. Al-Bayyinah: 5), social empathy (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13), and discipline (QS. As-Saff: 3) serve as guiding values for all pesantren activities from teaching and cleanliness routines to social interactions among students.

Observations show that each dormitory displays a board labeled "This Week's Qur'anic Value", featuring quotes from Quraish Shihab's tafsir and their practical explanations. For example, during the week themed "sincerity," a quote is displayed: "Sincerity is the peak of a pure heart; deeds without self-interest bring peace to the soul." Teachers and staff emphasize this value through direct examples, such as participating in cleaning activities alongside students, to instill sincerity in work.

"We don't just tell students to clean; we do it with them. That's a living tafsir of the verses on cleanliness and sincerity," said one dormitory teacher (Interview, July 22, 2025).

At Darussalam, the Qur'anic culture manifests through the use of verses and tafsir quotations in every public announcement and piece of advice. For instance, bulletin boards feature excerpts from Tafsir Al-Misbah explaining QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11 on the virtue of knowledge or QS. Al-Hujurat: 10 on brotherhood (Ri, 2020). These values have become part of students' daily life, nurturing a strong spiritual atmosphere. Documentation shows Qur'anic posters, tafsir calligraphy, and daily verse reflections displayed throughout the pesantren. Students also frequently quote Quraish Shihab's tafsir in their speeches or discussions, indicating that tafsir values have become embedded in their speech and behavior. This integration demonstrates that Tafsir Al-Misbah functions not only as an instructional text but as a moral and cultural system within the pesantren. The emerging Qur'anic culture fosters polite, moderate, and reflective students in both thought and conduct.

The empirical findings reveal five core values that consistently emerge across cases: honesty (ṣidq), patience (ṣabr), responsibility (amānah), social empathy (ta'āwun), and sincerity in worship (ikhhlās). These values are not merely understood at a cognitive level but are internalized through students' everyday practices, including learning activities, religious observance, and social interactions.

Comparison of Implementation Between the Two Islamic Boarding Schools

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of Tafsir Al-Misbah at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Sungai Salak and Darul Rahman Islamic Boarding School in Tempuling shares a common goal to shape students' religious character based on Qur'anic values. However, the two institutions differ significantly in their approaches, methods, and orientations. These differences do not represent a contradiction but rather

reflect two distinctive models in the Indonesian pesantren tradition: the traditional-reflective and the modern dialogical, both striving to actualize Quraish Shihab's Qur'anic interpretation in students' everyday lives.

At Darussalam, the tafsir learning approach is reflective-normative, focusing primarily on moral formation, manners (*adab*), and self-control. Teachers use tafsir as a tool to instill values such as patience, responsibility, and sincerity. Learning activities are carried out through halaqah tafsir and evening Qur'anic study sessions, where teachers read and explain verses based on Tafsir Al-Misbah. In each session, teachers consistently relate the meanings of the verses to students' daily behavior. Observations show that teachers emphasize practical moral meanings rather than linguistic or historical analysis of the verses. This approach fosters a contemplative and solemn learning atmosphere. Students not only learn to understand the verses intellectually but are also guided to reflect on their own conduct and evaluate whether their actions align with Qur'anic values.

In contrast, Darul Rahman organizes thematic and participatory learning activities. Weekly tafsir discussions and reflection sessions are held where students write personal journals about Qur'anic values they have learned, such as empathy, responsibility, and leadership. Teachers provide reflective feedback to help students understand the connection between the verses and their social actions. This approach successfully cultivates critical thinking, communication skills, and moral-social awareness among students.

Another key difference lies in the dominant values emphasized. Darussalam highlights patience, responsibility, and sincerity, which are consistently reinforced in both learning and daily routines, such as cleaning duties, time discipline, and respect for teachers. On the other hand, Darul Rahman emphasizes tolerance, social empathy, and leadership. Teachers often relate tafsir discussions to current issues such as interfaith harmony, social justice, and civic responsibility. These values reflect an inclusive and moderate orientation in character education.

Thematic Analysis Based on Qur'anic Character Values

Field data analysis shows that implementing Tafsir Al-Misbah in learning at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School (Sungai Salak) and Darul Rahman Islamic Boarding School (*Tempuling*) consistently cultivates five core Qur'anic character values: honesty (*ṣidq*), patience (*ṣabr*), responsibility (*amānah*), social empathy (*ta'āwun*), and sincerity in worship (*ikhhlās*). These values emerge not only at the cognitive level but are also internalized in students' concrete behaviors in the dormitory, classroom, and socio-religious activities.

These findings were obtained through data triangulation across observations of tafsir learning activities, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of tafsir-based character education programs. Theoretically, the results align with Lickona's concept of religious character formation, which posits that genuine character formation occurs through three primary stages: knowing the good (understanding goodness), loving the good (loving goodness), and doing the good (enacting goodness). All three dimensions appear simultaneously within Tafsir Al-Misbah learning at both pesantren. (Lickona, 2018).

1. Honesty (*Ṣidq*) – QS. Al-Isra' [17]:34

Honesty occupies a central position in Qur'anic character education applied at both institutions. Based on interviews and observations, teachers at Darussalam consistently stress honesty as a "mirror of faith" that must be evident in daily actions.

In every test or assignment, students are reminded not to cheat; when violations occur, teachers avoid physical punishment and instead invite students to read and reflect on QS. Al-Isra' [17]:34. In Tafsir Al-Misbah, Quraish Shihab explains that trust and keeping promises are forms of honesty in social responsibility that indicate one's level of faith (Kaprawi, Salim, & Shobron, 2024). Documentation shows motivational Qur'anic posters in classrooms stating: "Honesty is a trust from Allah, not merely words spoken but truth lived."

At Darul Rahman, teachers use a reflective approach to instill this value. Students write personal experiences related to honesty in a "Qur'anic Reflection Journal." One student wrote: "I used to hide my mistakes to avoid being scolded. But after studying tafsir, I understood that being honest brings peace to the heart." (Student Reflection, 18 July 2025). Such practices make honesty not merely an ethical value but an internalized spiritual disposition through self-awareness.

2. Patience (Şabr) – QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:153

Patience features prominently in pesantren life, especially at Darussalam, which has a traditional reflective orientation. In tafsir classes, teachers often link patience to students' disciplined, rule-bound, and responsible routines. Observations show students are trained to control their emotions in disagreements or conflicts. Teachers consistently recall QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:153, which Tafsir Al-Misbah explains as portraying patience not as passivity but as an active strength that maintains steadfastness amidst trials (Shihab, 2002). One teacher stated in an interview:

"We do not admonish in anger; we use verses. When students quarrel, we read the tafsir of patience so they grasp the meaning of self-control." (Ust. H, 21 July 2025).

At Darul Rahman, patience is internalized through collaborative projects. Each group is tasked with a one-week social project; when disagreements arise, teachers use the moment to revisit the meaning of patience. Field notes record reflections such as: "I learned patience not because I was forced, but because I realized patience is calming." In both institutions, patience is understood not merely as anger management but as moral steadfastness to keep doing good amid challenges.

3. Responsibility (Amānah) – QS. Al-Mujadalah [58]:11

Responsibility is a hallmark of Tafsir Al-Misbah learning at both pesantren. At Darussalam, observations show students habituated to maintain cleanliness, follow study schedules, and complete duties without being told. Teachers connect these practices to QS. Al-Mujadalah [58]:11 on the excellence of knowledge and etiquette.

Quraish Shihab emphasizes that knowledgeable and responsible people are elevated by Allah. Teachers use reflective moral questions such as, "If Allah elevates the learned, how could an irresponsible student be called learned?", prompting students' self-assessment. At Darul Rahman, responsibility is developed through Qur'anic leadership projects. Student leaders are entrusted to organize peers and publicly account for their roles in discussion forums. Teachers assess not only outcomes but also leadership ethics and moral awareness. Documentation shows improved discipline and a stronger sense of collective responsibility following this program.

4. Social Empathy (Ta'āwun) – QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13

Social empathy is the most salient characteristic at Darul Rahman. Observations reveal students are encouraged to care for others, helping peers study, cleaning the environment, and engaging in community service. Teachers relate these practices to QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13, which Tafsir Al-Misbah explains as teaching that human diversity

exists so people may know and help one another, not demean each other. As one teacher noted:

“We want students to understand this verse is not merely a theory of brotherhood but a teaching of social empathy. They must learn to feel others’ feelings.” (Ust. A, 23 July 2025).

At Darussalam, empathy is nurtured through joint prayers and Friday night lessons for students’ families and the surrounding community. Students pray for sick peers, assist local residents, and donate from their own savings. Documentation indicates that this value fosters a strong sense of solidarity and togetherness, bridging personal faith and social responsibility, consistent with Quraish Shihab’s message that true faith radiates through compassionate human relations. (Mahfudz & Bishri, 2022).

5. Sincerity in Worship (Ikhlaṣ) – QS. Al-Bayyinah [98]:5

Sincerity is the core of Qur’anic character formation at both pesantren. Interviews show Darussalam’s teachers repeatedly stress that every deed must be intended for Allah, not for praise. In daily practices, cleaning the mosque, reciting the Qur’an, or helping friends, teachers remind students of QS. Al-Bayyinah [98]:5, which Tafsir Al-Misbah explains as teaching that sincerity is the essence of all accepted worship. A character teacher at Darussalam noted:

“We teach students to love goodness, not praise. If they act without self-interest, that proves they understand the tafsir of sincerity.” (Interview, 22 July 2025).

At Darul Rahman, sincerity is instilled through Qur’anic Reflection Videos, where students produce a short video on a chosen verse’s moral message without attaching their names. Assessment focuses not on production quality but on the authenticity of the message and students’ reflective grasp of the verse. Observations show a marked shift in worship motivation: students act not merely out of obligation but from deep spiritual awareness.

Discussion

Theoretical Integration of Tafsir Al-Misbah in Qur’anic Character Education

The findings of this study reinforce the theoretical position that tafsir learning functions not only as a means of understanding Qur’anic text but also as a transformative medium for shaping religious and social character. The integration of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* across pesantren learning practices demonstrates a strong convergence between character education theory, reflective learning, and contextual Qur’anic interpretation (Chairudin, Inayari, Hafidz, & Nashihin, 2023). These three theoretical strands collectively form a coherent foundation for Islamic education that is oriented toward values, attitudes, and behavioral transformation.

From the perspective of character education, the learning processes observed in both pesantren reflect Lickona’s triadic model of knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good. Students acquire moral knowledge through structured engagement with Qur’anic verses; they develop emotional attachment to values through reflective and spiritual activities; and they enact these values through daily practices such as honesty, patience, responsibility, and empathy (Aiyub & Mutia, 2023). This progression shows that tafsir learning does not remain at the cognitive level but extends into affective and behavioral domains, aligning with the broader goals of Islamic character formation.

The study also aligns with reflective learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of connecting experience with value-based reflection. In both pesantren,

reflective learning is operationalized through halaqah tafsir, weekly muhasabah, and student reflection journals. These practices mirror Dewey's and Kolb's principles that meaningful learning requires learners to interpret their experiences and relate them to life values. In the Islamic pedagogical tradition, this reflective process corresponds to *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*, which encourage contemplation and deliberation on divine guidance (Alfani, Addzaky, Mukhsin, Malintang, & Prabowo, 2025). At Darussalam, this reflection is expressed through moral evaluation and self-introspection, while at Darul Rahman, it is facilitated through dialogical engagement with contemporary social issues.

Furthermore, the findings affirm the relevance of Quraish Shihab's contextual tafsir paradigm, which emphasizes that Qur'anic interpretation must consider the lived realities of its readers (Hishnuddin & Jazilurrahman, 2025). In both pesantren, teachers consistently relate Qur'anic messages to issues such as learning ethics, social responsibility, sincerity in worship, and interpersonal respect. This demonstrates how *Tafsir Al-Misbah* operationalizes contextual interpretation within pedagogical practice, making Qur'anic values meaningful and applicable to students' daily lives. The dialogical and humanistic nature of Shihab's approach is particularly evident in Darul Rahman's thematic discussions and digital-based tafsir learning (Aziz & Sofarwati, 2021).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives show that tafsir learning in pesantren is not merely an academic exercise but a holistic process that integrates cognition, emotion, and action. The synergy among moral, reflective, and contextual paradigms creates an educational environment in which Qur'anic values are internalized through understanding, reflection, and practice (Purwanto, Saepudin, & Sofaussamawati, 2023). This integrative approach aligns with the Islamic educational ideal of forming individuals who are both knowledgeable and morally cultivated (*'ālim wa adīb*), consistent with the concept of *ta'dīb* articulated by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (Fauzan et al, 2023).

Pedagogical Implications and Contribution of the Three-Dimensional Integration Model

The pedagogical implications of this study highlight the significance of integrating *Tafsir Al-Misbah* across curricular, non-curricular, and cultural dimensions of pesantren education. Darussalam applies a reflective-normative model that emphasizes adab formation through habituation, teacher exemplarity, and structured moral reflection. In contrast, Darul Rahman adopts a dialogical-contextual model that incorporates digital media, thematic discussions, and Qur'anic character projects to cultivate critical thinking and social responsibility. Despite their differences, both models demonstrate that tafsir can function as a structured instrument of value transformation rather than a purely intellectual exercise.

A major contribution of this study is the formulation of a three-dimensional tafsir integration model. The curricular dimension provides structured engagement with Qur'anic meanings through formal classes, thematic tafsir sessions, and digital learning activities. The non-curricular dimension reinforces value internalization through halaqah, muhasabah, reflection forums, and character-based projects such as environmental campaigns inspired by Qur'anic verses (Kementerian Agama, 2020). The cultural dimension embeds Qur'anic values into institutional norms, routines, and symbolic practices, such as value boards, motivational posters, and reflective vlogs. These interconnected dimensions explain the pedagogical pathways through which Qur'anic interpretation is transformed into students' character, addressing a gap in tafsir tarbawi literature that has focused more on identifying values than on explaining mechanisms of internalization.

The findings also affirm that habituation and teacher exemplarity are central mechanisms of character formation. Teachers in both pesantren act not only as transmitters of knowledge but as moral exemplars (*uswah hasanah*) and reflective facilitators who guide students in applying Qur'anic values to real-life situations. At Darussalam, teachers serve as spiritual mentors (*mursyid ruhani*) who cultivate moral awareness through introspection and value-based routines. At Darul Rahman, teachers function as dialogical mentors who encourage students to articulate personal interpretations and relate them to contemporary social issues (Interview with Ustadzah B, July 18, 2025; Interview with Ust. A, July 22, 2025). These complementary roles illustrate a paradigm shift in tafsir education from authoritative transmission to value facilitation.

The study also challenges the prevailing assumption that tafsir learning is inherently textual and cognitive. The systematic integration of tafsir across multiple educational domains demonstrates that tafsir can serve as a holistic pedagogical system that connects the cognitive dimension, the affective dimension, and the behavioral dimension. This integrative function addresses a persistent limitation in character education, where these dimensions are often treated separately.

Finally, the study offers analytically generalizable insights for broader Islamic education. While the model is not intended for mechanical replication, its core principles of reflective learning, value habituation, and institutional culture building are transferable to other pesantren and faith-based educational settings. The findings underscore that effective Qur'anic character education requires an integrated ecosystem in which knowledge (*'ilm*), values (*akhlak*), and practice (*'amal*) are inseparable components of the learning process. This insight contributes to contemporary Islamic educational theory by emphasizing that tafsir education is not merely the transmission of religious knowledge but a process of forming morally reflective and socially responsible individuals.

Conclusion

This study shows that the integration of *Tafsir Al-Misbah* in pesantren education effectively answers the research question by demonstrating how Qur'anic interpretation can function as a coherent pedagogical framework for character formation. The cross-case analysis reveals that reflective-normative and dialogical-contextual approaches are complementary rather than competing, and that tafsir becomes most transformative when it mediates between textual understanding, moral reflection, and lived practice. In both pesantren, tafsir operates not merely as an exegetical reference but as a structured mechanism through which Qur'anic values are internalized and enacted in students' daily behavior.

Methodologically, this study is limited by its qualitative design, its focus on two pesantren within a single socio-cultural region, and its reliance on self-reported and observational data. These boundaries restrict statistical generalizability and leave unexplored the influence of external factors such as family background or community environment. Future research should expand to diverse pesantren typologies, employ longitudinal designs to trace value internalization over time, and incorporate mixed-methods approaches to strengthen empirical robustness.

Future studies may examine how tafsir-based pedagogies function in urban, hybrid, or international Islamic schools, or explore how digital tafsir platforms shape youth religiosity. Practically, the study underscores the need for curriculum designers to embed tafsir as a cross-cutting framework, for teacher training programs to cultivate reflective

facilitation and moral exemplarity, and for institutions to adopt formative, reflection-based character assessments. Theoretically, the study contributes to Islamic education by positioning tafsir as an operational model of ethical formation that integrates knowledge, values, and practice within a unified pedagogical system.

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