



Strengthening Students' Religious Character Through Basic Darul Arqam Training Using the MICAR Model Approach: A Case Study at Muhammadiyah University of Bandung

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Abstract

The development of religious character is a fundamental component of Muhammadiyah higher education. The Basic Darul Arqam Training (DAD) serves as a strategic leadership development tool for instilling Islamic values, yet its effectiveness is highly dependent on the pedagogical approach employed. This study aims to describe and analyze the process of strengthening students' religious character through the application of the MICAR Model (Motivation, Interaction, Collaboration, Attention, Reflection) in DAD training at Muhammadiyah University of Bandung. The research method employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection techniques included participant observation, in-depth interviews with participants and instructors, document analysis, and participants' written reflections. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman technique: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the MICAR Model is capable of strengthening students' religious character through increased spiritual motivation, intensive religious interaction among participants, collaboration in worship activities and Islamic discussions, deep attention to the values of Muhammadiyah teachings, and spiritual reflection that encourages attitudinal change. These findings confirm that the integration of MICAR into DAD training can serve as an effective and transformative strategy in the formation of students' religious character.

Keywords: Article; Religious Character, Darul Arqam Training, Islamic values, MICAR Model

Abstrak

Pembentukan karakter religius menjadi bagian fundamental dalam pendidikan tinggi Muhammadiyah. Pelatihan Darul Arqam Dasar (DAD) merupakan instrumen kaderisasi yang strategis untuk menanamkan nilai-nilai Islam, namun efektivitasnya sangat bergantung pada pendekatan pedagogis yang digunakan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis proses penguatan karakter religius mahasiswa melalui penerapan Model MICAR (Motivation, Interaction, Collaboration, Attention, Reflection) dalam pelatihan DAD di Universitas Muhammadiyah Bandung. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan peserta dan instruktur, analisis dokumen, serta refleksi tertulis peserta. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan teknik Miles dan Huberman: reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan Model MICAR mampu memperkuat karakter religius mahasiswa melalui peningkatan motivasi spiritual, interaksi religius yang intensif antar peserta, kolaborasi dalam kegiatan ibadah dan diskusi keislaman, perhatian mendalam terhadap nilai-nilai ajaran Muhammadiyah, serta

refleksi spiritual yang mendorong perubahan sikap. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa integrasi MICAR dalam pelatihan DAD dapat menjadi strategi efektif dan transformatif dalam pembentukan karakter religius mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: karakter religius, pelatihan Darul Arqam, nilai Islam, Model MICAR

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Introduction

The development of religious character is the primary goal of Muhammadiyah education, as outlined in the Muhammadiyah Personality and the Guidelines for Islamic Living for Muhammadiyah Members. At the university level, the religious character development of students is carried out through various AIK courses and leadership training programs, one of which is the Basic Darul Arqam Training (DAD) (Jannah, 2021). DAD is designed to build the religious, ideological, and militant understanding of cadres based on the values of Islam and Muhammadiyah.

The instillation of religious character values is the most vital element in the educational process for fostering a resilient, outstanding, and morally upright generation (Fikriah et al., 2025; Dody S Truna 2025). The nation's youth serve as the main pillars of the nation in building a progressive, dignified civilization grounded in moral values (Hasibuan, 2025). Strengthening religious character must receive serious and comprehensive attention, as the formation of a resilient personality is key to facing the challenges and dynamics of the increasingly rapid development of science and technology (Yusuf, 2023). Religious character can create a resilient generation capable of adapting to the changing times, possessing high competitiveness, good ethics, and a sense of social responsibility to make positive contributions to the nation and the world.

In this context, the development of religious character has become an urgent necessity. Religious character serves as a moral foundation that guides students toward strong faith, noble character, and a sense of responsibility toward themselves, society, and the environment (Haura et al., 2023; Afuwah, 2024). Higher education institutions, particularly those grounded in Islamic values such as Muhammadiyah University, bear a significant responsibility for instilling these religious values through various character education programs (Pulungan, 2022; Sakkir, 2025).

However, several studies indicate that the internalization of religious values in leadership development programs is often hindered by approaches that are ceremonial in nature, lecture-centered, and fail to address aspects of motivation, interaction, reflection, and a deep appreciation of values (Hartini, 2021; Dacholfanyet al., 2023).

Consequently, changes in students' religious character do not always last or translate into their daily attitudes and behaviors.

As the nation's future generation, students are the cornerstone of building a dignified national civilization. They are not only expected to possess intellectual intelligence but also a resilient and religious character to face the increasingly complex challenges of the times (Fauzi, 2020; Yinkore, 2025). However, in today's era of globalization, moral and spiritual challenges have become increasingly prominent issues among students. Phenomena such as moral decadence refer to the decline of values and ethical norms that should serve as guidelines in social life (Muttaqin et al., 2023; Sada et al., 2024). Among students, moral decadence can be identified through various negative behaviors, such as violations of academic norms (plagiarism, cheating on exams), a lack of respect for faculty or fellow students, a hedonistic lifestyle, a lack of empathy toward social issues, and involvement in immoral acts such as drug abuse or violence (Sakinah Hasbi et al., 2023; Khairani, 2023; Putri et al., 2023).

The MICAR model (Motivation, Interaction, Collaboration, Attention, Reflection) was developed as a character education approach that emphasizes motivational processes, meaningful interaction, collaboration, active attention, and deep reflection. This model has proven effective in enhancing students' social character within the context of the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah course (Amriani, 2024). Given the MICAR model's focus on value transformation, this approach holds significant potential for application in Basic Darul Arqam Training (DAD). MICAR provides a pedagogical framework that is more humanistic, collaborative, and reflective, thereby strengthening the process of internalizing religious values within DAD in a deeper and more transformative manner.

Therefore, this study is important to describe how the MICAR model is applied in DAD training, how the process of strengthening students' religious character takes shape, and the factors that influence it. This study is expected to contribute to the development of Muhammadiyah's leadership development strategies at the university level.

One strategic program that can be implemented is the Darul Arqam Basic Training. The Darul Arqam Basic Training program is part of Muhammadiyah's leadership development initiative, designed to strengthen religious understanding and instill Islamic values—namely, the values of tawhid, worship, and ethics and instill Islamic values namely, the values of monotheism, worship, and moral conduct ,and

shape students' character to be religious and of high integrity (Mutia Miftahul Jannah Yusnan, 2022; Altifani, 2023). Basic Darul Arqam does not focus solely on spiritual aspects but also integrates social, cultural, and intellectual values, enabling students to become individuals of noble character who make positive contributions to society. The Basic Darul Arqam Training is highly relevant for addressing the moral challenges faced by students today. With a systematic approach, this training not only provides a theoretical understanding of Islamic values but also equips students with practical skills to internalize religious values in their daily lives (Hadisaputra, 2021; Afriyanto, 2023). Furthermore, the Basic Darul Arqam program also plays a role in strengthening ukhuwah Islamiyah, so that students can support one another in developing their religious character.

Given this urgency, research on strategies for strengthening students' religious character values through Basic Darul Arqam Training is important to conduct, specifically addressing the following questions: (1) How is the MICAR Model approach implemented in Basic Darul Arqam Training at Muhammadiyah University of Bandung? (2) How is the strengthening of students' religious character formed through the application of the MICAR Model in Basic Darul Arqam Training? (3) What factors support and hinder the application of the MICAR Model in strengthening students' religious character during the training? This study aims to (1) describe the process of implementing the MICAR Model in the Basic Darul Arqam Training, (2) analyze how students' religious character is strengthened through the MICAR approach in the Basic Darul Arqam Training, and (3) identify the factors that support and hinder the effectiveness of the MICAR Model's implementation in strengthening students' religious character.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the strategies for strengthening students' religious character through the Darul Arqam Basic (DAD) training program (John W. Creswell, 2023). The case study specifically focuses on the implementation of the MICAR Model (Motivation, Interaction, Collaboration, Attention, Reflection) within the DAD program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bandung as a pedagogical strategy for fostering students' religious character. This case emerged from the reality that DAD, as a compulsory cadre formation program in Muhammadiyah

higher education, is often carried out formally and administratively, with limited impact on the internalization of Islamic values. Many students initially participate merely to fulfill academic requirements rather than as a transformative spiritual process. Therefore, this study investigates how the integration of MICAR transforms DAD into a more participatory, reflective, and meaningful learning experience. The primary focus is on understanding students' experiences, perceptions, and behavioral changes during the training process, particularly in relation to spiritual motivation, religious interaction among participants, collaboration in worship practices and Islamic discussions, attention to Muhammadiyah values, and personal reflection that encourages attitude transformation.

Data collection techniques include direct observation of training sessions, participant activities, and instructor interactions; in-depth interviews with facilitators, instructors, participants, and program administrators; written reflections from participants; and document analysis of training modules, materials, and supporting policies. Field notes were taken to record key findings during the research process. Data analysis was conducted in three stages: (a) data reduction to filter relevant information; (b) data presentation in the form of narratives, tables, or diagrams to identify patterns; and (c) drawing conclusions and verification through triangulation of data, methods, and theory to ensure the validity of the research results. This combination of techniques provides a comprehensive understanding of how the MICAR-based Basic Darul Arqam training effectively strengthens students' religious character and transforms DAD from a formal cadre activity into a meaningful character-building process.

All data obtained from the informants were analyzed through a data reduction process to select relevant information, which was then organized and categorized into main themes representing the substance of the research. Subsequently, each theme was presented systematically to comprehensively describe the research findings in accordance with what the narrators conveyed.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Informants

Informant	Lecturer/Instructor/Facilitator	Gender
SPT	Lecturer	Male
SPA	Lecturer	Male
BUY	Lecturer	Male
MLK	Lecturer	Female
AIN	Instructor	Female
AMK	Instructor	Male
BSN	Instructor	Male
YLM	Facilitator	Female
AMD	Facilitator	Male
BYN	Facilitator	Male

Results and Discussion

Overview of the Implementation of MICAR-Based DAD

The Basic Darul Arqam Training (DAD) is conducted over three days and includes a series of activities such as strengthening faith, understanding the Muhammadiyah ideology, religious practices, contemplation of nature, group discussions, and daily reflections. Based on observations, the MICAR approach has been integrated into the flow of activities, particularly during the initial motivational session, group discussions, communal worship activities, and the final session reflection. Facilitators serve as motivators, mediators, and spiritual guides by providing inspiration through exemplary stories, reflective verses, and reinforcing progressive Islamic values.

The Darul Arqam Basic course strengthens students' understanding of Islamic teachings, such as the concepts of tawhid, worship, ethics, and other fundamental principles of Islam (Wakit et al., 2023; Siswanto; Miftakhi, 2026). Students demonstrated a significant improvement in understanding after participating in the training. This is reflected in their ability to explain basic Islamic concepts more accurately, a stronger religious attitude, and increased awareness in applying Islamic teachings in daily life, both in personal and social contexts.

1. Application of the MICAR Components in DAD Activities

Motivation (Spiritual Motivation)

Motivation was fostered through an opening session designed to awaken religious awareness, ice-breaking activities centered on Islamic values, and an explanation of what it means to be a Muhammadiyah cadre. In interviews, students reported feeling a stronger sense of calling to improve the quality of their worship and deepen their understanding of their Islamic identity. The findings indicate that strong spiritual motivation fostered the students' mental readiness to embrace religious values throughout the training.

Interaction (Religious Interaction)

Interaction takes place through small-group discussions, Q&A sessions with instructors and facilitators, and dialogues about worship experiences. This intensive interaction encourages students to speak openly about spiritual challenges that were previously rarely discussed. Findings indicate that guided religious interaction enhances participants' understanding of religious values and strengthens solidarity among them.

Collaboration (Collaboration in Worship and Tasks)

Collaboration is manifested in congregational tahajud prayers, the development of moral values projects, teamwork within a group to foster a sense of togetherness and strengthen solidarity, and group discussions to find solutions to contemporary issues. Through observation, this collaboration fosters a sense of responsibility, empathy, and discipline. Findings: Collaborative activities accelerate the development of collective character and social awareness.

Attention (Participants' Attention to Islamic Values)

Participants' attention was evident in their focused listening to the material, note-taking on key points, and enthusiasm when the instructor presented material on Muhammadiyah ideology. Instructors and facilitators reported that participants' attention levels were higher than in training sessions using traditional lecture methods. The findings indicate that attention increased because MICAR engages both emotional and intellectual involvement simultaneously.

Reflection (Participants' Spiritual Reflections)

Reflection takes place through nightly self-reflection, daily reflection journals, and a closing reflection session at the end of the training. Students share spiritual experiences such as a heightened awareness of worship, a sense of gratitude, and a commitment to moral improvement. The findings indicate that reflection serves as the culmination of the process of internalizing religious values, as participants connect the course material with their personal experiences.

2. Strengthening Students' Religious Character

Based on the analysis of interviews, observations, and reflection journals, the following religious character development was observed: (1) improved religious discipline, specifically, participants reported becoming accustomed to praying on time, reading the Quran daily, and praying before and after activities; (2) strengthened moral attitudes, evidenced by increased honesty, responsibility, simplicity, and concern for others; (3) deepening of a progressive Islamic identity: participants began to understand the principles of progressive Islam, their role as young Muhammadiyah cadres, and the importance of being role models; (4) social awareness through collaborative activities: students demonstrated empathy, a willingness to help peers, and active participation in social activities.

Religious values emphasized in the training—such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and good manners have successfully helped shape students' character for the better (Kasturi, 2025; Thelma, 2025). This is evident in changes to their attitudes and behavior in daily activities, such as being more punctual in attending classes, showing respect to professors and peers, and being more active in religious activities on campus. Additionally, the Darul Arqam Basic (DAD) training also encourages students to use Islamic values as a guide in making decisions and acting in social life (Jannah, 2021). Attitudes of tolerance, empathy toward others, and a spirit of spreading kindness become more prominent. With the development of a strong religious character, students are expected not only to be intellectually capable but also to possess noble character and be able to serve as agents of change within society.

The religious values fostered are not only individual in nature but also social, reflecting a balance between one's relationship with God (*hablumminallah*) and with fellow human beings (*hablumminannas*) (Yaqin, 2024). The Basic Darul Arqam Training emphasizes that ideal religiosity is not only reflected in personal worship but also in social attitudes that embody compassion, justice, and care for others. This understanding encourages students to become fully religious individuals, not only in religious rituals but also in their daily social behavior (Amriani, 2024). Thus, religious values serve as a moral foundation that shapes personal integrity while strengthening students' social roles as individuals who contribute to the welfare of the community and the nation (Amrian et al 2023; Susiawati et al., 2025).

3. Internalization of Muhammadiyah Values

The Basic Darul Arqam Training instills the values of the Muhammadiyah movement such as *tajdid* (renewal), *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), and *dakwah amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (preaching what is good and forbidding what is evil) so that students better understand their role as Muhammadiyah cadres (M. Agus, 2025; M. Munir, 2025). These values are conveyed through lectures, discussions, and group reflections that emphasize the importance of playing an active role in building a progressive society. Students are encouraged not only to understand these values theoretically but also to implement them in their daily lives.

As a result, the students have demonstrated a more open attitude toward intellectual renewal, have become more active in fostering harmonious cooperation among one another, and have shown the courage to advocate for what is good and to reject what is wrong in a wise manner. They also began to demonstrate an awareness of the importance of becoming agents of *da'wah* and change within society, in line with the spirit of Muhammadiyah as an Islamic movement oriented toward the purification of faith, the improvement of the quality of life for the *ummah*, and the strengthening of civilization. The internalization of the values of the Basic Darul Arqam training serves as a crucial foundation in shaping students who are not only loyal to the organization but also prepared to carry forward Muhammadiyah's struggle in the future (Altifani, 2023; Abdullah, 2025).

MICAR as a Transformative Approach to Strengthening Religious Character

Research findings indicate that the MICAR model provides students with opportunities to engage in an active, emotional, social, and reflective learning process (Amriani, 2024). This aligns with character education theory, which emphasizes that values are not merely understood but must be internalized through real-life experiences. Motivation fosters spiritual awareness, interaction broadens understanding, collaboration cultivates social ethics, attention focuses the learning process, and reflection strengthens internal transformation.

The Relevance of MICAR to the Principles of Muhammadiyah Cadre Development

Research findings support the literature indicating that Muhammadiyah's cadre development aims not only to impart knowledge but also to shape an Islamic character. MICAR helps translate these principles into a systematic development process. DAD training using the MICAR model makes the development process more dialogic, participatory, emotionally engaging, and meaningful.

Training methods based on experiential learning, such as discussions, religious practices, and simulations, provide students with direct experiences to internalize religious values. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, in which knowledge is constructed through experience (Pratami, 2024; Miftakhi, 2026). This approach enables students not only to understand the material cognitively but also to experience it affectively and apply it psychomotorically. Furthermore, students' active engagement in the learning process makes them more reflective regarding the values being studied, thereby making the development of attitudes and character more meaningful and sustainable (Nur, 2022; Setyosari et al., 2024). Evaluation of the training outcomes indicates improvements in knowledge, attitudes, and religious skills, suggesting that this approach is effective in supporting students' holistic self-transformation.

The Roles of Instructors and Facilitators

Instructors play a crucial role in guiding students through an inspiring and interactive approach, thereby making the process of internalizing values more effective. Instructors serve as both conveyors of material and role models in their attitudes, words, and daily actions. This exemplary behavior is a key factor in engaging students' affective aspects, encouraging them to voluntarily and deeply emulate Islamic values (Moh. Nasrul Amin, 2024). Additionally, instructors create a conducive, dialogic, and reflective learning environment, enabling students to explore their understanding, express their opinions, and openly share their spiritual and social experiences. With emotional and intellectual support from instructors and facilitators, students feel more valued and motivated to undergo a holistic process of self-transformation within the framework of Islamic and Muhammadiyah values.

The results of the study indicate that each thematic category encompassing spiritual values plays a significant role in strengthening students' religious character. These findings confirm that the internalization of spiritual values whether through religious practices, moral habits, or religious interactions is capable of fostering a deeper religious consciousness and encouraging behavior consistent with Islamic principles in daily life. Detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Results

Theme	Subtheme	Data	Interpretatio
Spiritual Values	Night Prayer	Performing qiyam al-layl in congregation.	The practice of nightly worship strengthens students' spiritual connection with God and instills discipline.
	Religious Studies	Study of Quranic verses and discussion.	Qur'anic studies and discussions enhance religious understanding and support students' critical reflection.
	Prayer in Congregation	Prayer in congregation: a measure of faith and piety.	Praying in congregation strengthens the sense of community and enhances students' faith and piety.
Social Value	Human Relations	Improving relationships with others.	Religious values strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster a strong sense of social awareness.
	Benefits for Others	To nurture Muslim individuals who are of benefit to others.	Through the DAD program, students are guided to become individuals who contribute to society.
Character Building	Worship Practices	Building religious character through the practice of worship.	The practice of regular worship fosters a consistent and deeply ingrained religious character in students.
	Critical Thinking	Developing students' critical thinking skills through discussion forums.	Discussions in religious studies foster the development of students' critical thinking skills, which are essential for understanding and applying religious teachings.
	Encouraging Good Deeds and Discouraging Evil	Encouraging what is good and forbidding what is evil.	This value encourages students to actively contribute to their social environment by promoting good and preventing evil

The findings presented in Table 2 demonstrate that the internalization of spiritual, social, and character values through the Basic Darul Arqam (DAD) program

contributes significantly to strengthening students' religious character. Spiritual activities, such as qiyam al-layl, congregational prayers, and Qur'anic studies, not only enhance students' relationship with God but also cultivate discipline, self-awareness, and critical reflection. Furthermore, social values developed through interpersonal relationships and the principle of benefiting others encourage students to become more empathetic and socially responsible individuals. Character-building activities, including worship practices, religious discussions, and the implementation of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, foster students' critical thinking skills and strengthen their commitment to applying Islamic values in everyday life. These findings indicate that the integration of spiritual experiences, social engagement, and reflective learning within the MICAR framework effectively supports the holistic development of students' religious character. The results also confirm that religious education is not limited to cognitive understanding but encompasses affective and behavioral dimensions that shape students into individuals who possess strong faith, moral integrity, and social responsibility.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Basic Darul Arqam Training (DAD), when combined with the MICAR model, has proven effective in strengthening the religious character of students at Muhammadiyah University of Bandung. The integration of MICAR which encompasses motivation, interaction, collaboration, care, and reflection makes the mentoring process more dynamic, participatory, and meaningful, thereby enhancing students' religious discipline, understanding of Islamic values, and spiritual depth. Through activities such as qiyamul lail, religious studies, mentoring, and character-building exercises, students experience positive changes in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, including the development of character, responsibility, trustworthiness, and social awareness. Thus, the MICAR-based DAD Training serves as a comprehensive and relevant strategy for strengthening students' religious character and has the potential to be implemented more widely in other Muhammadiyah universities.

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