

The Dynamics of Formal Islamic Education in Developing Student Character in the *Wetu Telu* Indigenous Community

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Article Info

Article history:

Accepted: 24 February 2026

Publish: 28 February 2026

Keywords:

Formal Islamic Education,
Character Building,
Wetu Telu Community,
Local Wisdom.

Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of formal Islamic education in character development among students in the Wetu Telu indigenous community in Lombok. The Wetu Telu community has a unique belief system and traditions, a blend of Islamic values with deeply rooted animist and Hindu practices. This situation presents unique challenges for formal Islamic educational institutions in instilling Islamic values while respecting the local wisdom that exists within the community. This study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods to explore in depth how schools or madrasahs formulate learning strategies, integrate Islamic religious education curricula, and build harmonious relationships between normative Islamic values and Wetu Telu traditions. The results indicate that formal Islamic education plays a significant role in shaping students' character through a dialogical and accommodative approach, not eliminating local traditions but instead serving as a bridge for internalizing moral values, honesty, responsibility, and religiosity. However, various structural and cultural barriers remain that need to be addressed for the character development process to be optimal and sustainable.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Formal Islamic education plays a strategic role in shaping the character of a young generation with faith, noble morals, and a national outlook. In the context of a pluralistic society like Indonesia, Islamic education serves not only as a means of transferring religious knowledge but also as an instrument for character development capable of responding to the challenges of the times. This aligns with the goals of national education as stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that education aims to develop the potential of students to become individuals who are faithful, pious, have noble morals, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. However, the implementation of formal Islamic education in the field does not always run smoothly, especially when dealing with communities with strong belief systems and traditional customs, such as the Wetu Telu indigenous community in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (Mukhlis, 2022).

The Wetu Telu indigenous community inhabits parts of North Lombok, particularly the Bayan region. They are known for their unique Islamic practices that differ from mainstream Islamic practices. In their daily lives, the Wetu Telu community still practices various traditional rituals, such as the gawe urip (traditional ceremony), gawe pati (traditional ceremony), and other ancestral traditions believed to be sacred and must be maintained as part of their cultural identity. This complex socio-religious context presents unique challenges for formal Islamic educational institutions operating in the region, as educators must balance the demands of the national curriculum with the cultural realities within the community (Hidayatullah & Asyari, 2023).

Character development in formal Islamic education is a holistic and ongoing process, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions. Lickona (in Zainuddin, 2022) emphasizes that effective character education must involve knowledge of goodness, feelings toward goodness, and actions that consistently reflect goodness. In the context of the Wetu Telu community, the process of internalizing Islamic character values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and tolerance cannot be done solely textually but must consider the local cultural context surrounding students' lives. Students growing up in families adhering to the Wetu Telu tradition are exposed daily to a system of customary values and norms that in some ways differ, or even overlap, with the values taught in school. This situation has the potential to cause identity confusion in students if not managed with an appropriate and wise approach (Rahmawati, 2023).

Various studies have shown that formal Islamic educational institutions located in indigenous communities require specific, contextual and adaptive strategies. Educational approaches that ignore local wisdom tend to create a distance between schools and the community, making the learning process less meaningful for students. Conversely, approaches that integrate Islamic values with local wisdom have proven more effective in building students' character holistically, as students do not feel uprooted from their own cultural roots (Nurhayati & Fauzi, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, deemed most appropriate for examining the dynamics of formal Islamic education in developing student character in the Wetu Telu indigenous community in depth and context. This approach enabled researchers to understand the meaning, processes, and complex cultural interactions between normative Islamic values and local traditions prevalent within the community (Creswell & Poth, 2021). The research was conducted at a formal Islamic educational institution located in the Wetu Telu customary area of Bayan, North Lombok Regency.

The data sources for this study consisted of primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with the principal, Islamic religious education teachers, students, parents, local traditional and religious leaders, and secondary data sourced from curriculum documents, character development programs, and various relevant scientific literature. Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation studies. All collected data were then analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data is guaranteed through triangulation techniques of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checking to ensure the conformity of the researcher's interpretation with the actual experiences of the informants (Sugiyono, 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Dynamics of Formal Islamic Education in the Wetu Telu Indigenous Community

Research results indicate that the implementation of formal Islamic education in the Wetu Telu indigenous community takes place within a complex dynamic, full of nuances, and fraught with a continuous process of cultural negotiation. Formal Islamic educational institutions, such as elementary and junior high schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah) in Bayan District, North Lombok Regency, not only serve as venues for the transfer of religious knowledge but also serve as a meeting place for two distinct value systems: normative Islam, derived from the national curriculum, and Wetu Telu customary traditions, deeply rooted in the community for centuries. The meeting of these two value systems does not always lead to conflict; in many cases, it creates a space for productive dialogue and enriches the overall learning process (Hidayatullah & Asyari, 2023).

Educators working in the Wetu Telu community consistently acknowledge that the process of learning Islam cannot be conducted in a textual, rigid manner, and detached from the students' cultural context. They recognize that students raised in families with Wetu Telu

traditions bring their cultural value systems, beliefs, and practices ingrained in them from childhood into the classroom. This situation encourages teachers to creatively develop a more dialogical, contextual, and accommodating learning approach to existing local wisdom, without compromising the substance of Islamic teachings, for which they are responsible as religious educators. This effort is not easy, as it requires a high level of cultural sensitivity, a deep understanding of Wetu Telu traditions, and creative and innovative pedagogical skills in developing learning materials relevant to students' real lives (Mukhlis, 2022).

Field findings also reveal that most students from families with Wetu Telu traditions have religious understandings influenced by two value systems: the Islamic teachings received at school and the traditional traditions passed down within the family and community. This creates a situation where students often experience value tension between what is taught by religious teachers at madrasah and what is practiced by parents and traditional leaders at home and during various traditional ceremonies. However, research findings indicate that these tensions do not always lead to open conflict or destructive identity crises. Instead, many students are able to utilize these value tensions as a moment for self-reflection, ultimately enriching their understanding of both religious and cultural identity. This phenomenon aligns with Mukhlis's (2022) view that Islamic education in indigenous communities is essentially a continuous process of dialogue between universal Islam and local Islam, mutually enriching and complementing one another.

B. Strategies for Developing Student Character in the Context of Wetu Telu Culture

In an effort to effectively develop student character amidst the complexity of Wetu Telu culture, educators in formal Islamic educational institutions have developed various adaptive, innovative, and contextual strategies. The first strategy identified is an integrative role model approach, where teachers not only model Islamic values in the classroom but also actively participate in various social, cultural, and community activities organized by the Wetu Telu community. In this way, teachers build trust and a genuine emotional closeness with the community, making the character development process they undertake in schools more easily accepted, internalized, and understood by students and parents. This role model approach has proven effective because true character is formed not only through verbal instruction in the classroom, but also through consistent observation and deep appreciation of the actual behavior of respected individuals in students' daily lives (Rahmawati, 2023).

The second strategy implemented is the integration of Wetu Telu local wisdom into the materials, methods, and approaches to Islamic religious education. Teachers who are successful in developing student character are generally those who are able to creatively find meaningful intersections between Wetu Telu traditional values and the Islamic values taught in the curriculum. For example, the concepts of mutual cooperation and togetherness, highly valued in Wetu Telu traditions, are linked to the values of Islamic brotherhood and *ta'awun* (religious brotherhood). The practice of respecting nature and the environment in Wetu Telu beliefs is linked to the concept of *khalifah fil ardh* (vicegerent) and the prohibition of causing damage to the earth in Islamic teachings. The values of politeness and respect for elders in local customs are integrated with the concepts of *birrul walidain* (good character) and *adab* (good manners) in Islam. Through this integrative approach, students do not perceive the Islamic religious education they receive in school as contradictory or threatening to their cultural identity, but rather as strengthening, refining, and providing a more solid theological foundation for the values they have inherited from their ancestors. Nurhayati and Fauzi (2023) emphasized that integrating local wisdom into Islamic religious education significantly increases students' active engagement in the learning process and strengthens the internalization of character values holistically and sustainably.

The third strategy is the synergistic and ongoing involvement of traditional and religious leaders in school character development programs. Several Islamic schools in the Bayan region routinely and systematically invite Wetu Telu traditional leaders to attend and actively participate in various school activities, such as Islamic holiday commemorations, short-term

Islamic boarding school activities, cultural and religious dialogue forums, and other student self-development activities. Conversely, schools also actively send teacher and student representatives to participate in various traditional ceremonies held by the community, as a form of respect and recognition of local traditional values. This pattern of reciprocal, mutually respectful relationships creates a climate conducive to student character development, as students receive a consistent message that traditional and Islamic identities are not contradictory and require a choice, but rather two dimensions of identity that can coexist harmoniously and mutually reinforce each other (Zainuddin, 2022).

The fourth, equally important strategy is the implementation of a habit-building approach and a character-based school culture. Madrasah administrators in the Wetu Telu area are building a school culture that consistently reflects Islamic character values in every aspect of school life, from regulations and daily programs to classroom decorations and even communication between teachers and students. Habitual programs such as congregational prayer, reading the Quran before class, greetings and greetings, and weekly almsgiving activities become routines that slowly but surely shape the habitus of Islamic character in students. This habit-building approach refers to the principle that character is formed through consistent repetition of behavior until it becomes an ingrained habit, as emphasized by Lickona in Zainuddin (2022) that effective character education must be able to transform knowledge of goodness into automatic and enjoyable habits of good deeds.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results and discussion outlined above, several important conclusions can be drawn regarding the dynamics of formal Islamic education in fostering student character in the Wetu Telu indigenous community. First, the implementation of formal Islamic education within the Wetu Telu indigenous community takes place within a complex and nuanced dynamic, where Islamic educational institutions serve not only as venues for the transfer of religious knowledge but also as arenas for cultural negotiation between normative Islamic values and deeply rooted local traditions. This dynamic is fundamentally productive and constructive, as it fosters ongoing dialogue between universal Islam and local Islam, mutually enriching each other, making the educational process more meaningful and contextualized for students' real lives.

Second, fostering student character within the Wetu Telu indigenous community requires adaptive, integrative, and contextual strategies. Proven effective strategies include an integrative role model approach, integrating local wisdom into Islamic religious education, synergistic involvement of traditional and religious leaders in school programs, and the implementation of a character-based school culture through consistent inculcation of Islamic values. The success of these strategies is largely determined by the ability of educators to understand and appreciate the socio-cultural context of the local community, so that the character building process can be sincerely accepted by students, parents, and the indigenous community as a whole..

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With deep gratitude, I express my deepest gratitude to all those who have provided support, assistance, and prayers in the process of compiling this work. Thank you to my family for their continued encouragement. May all the good deeds you have given be rewarded many times over by God Almighty.

6. LITERATURE

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