

Integrating the Prophet's Parenting Model to Strengthen Student Character in the Digital Age: A Qualitative Study at SMPN 1 Payaraman

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ABSTRACT

Integrating the Prophet Muhammad's parenting model into the modern education system is becoming increasingly urgent in the digital age, where students face moral fragmentation, excessive media exposure and a weakening of character development. This study explores how the Prophet Muhammad's parenting model, derived from the Sunnah, can be integrated to strengthen pupils' character at SMPN 1 Payaraman. The aim of this study is to analyse the form, process, and implications of integrating the Prophet's parenting values within the context of a state lower secondary school. Using a single-case qualitative study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with twelve participants (the headteacher, teachers, and students), non-participant observation over a three-month period, and document analysis comprising the school's vision statement, lesson plans, and activity reports. Data were analysed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's framework to identify patterns related to the implementation of the principles of the Prophet's upbringing. The findings revealed three dominant character domains: (1) honesty (*al-sidq*) and trustworthiness (*al-amanah*), reflected in integrity-based programmes such as the honesty canteen and anti-cheating initiatives; (2) compassion (*ar-rahmah*) and respect (*al-ihthiram*), reflected in teacher-pupil interactions, peer mentoring, and restorative disciplinary approaches; and (3) the love of knowledge (*thalab al-'ilmi*) and cleanliness, embedded in academic motivation and the school's culture of cleanliness. Exemplary leadership (*al-qudwah*) demonstrated by the headteacher and teachers emerges as the primary mechanism for internalisation. This study concludes that integrating the Prophet Muhammad's parenting model provides a contextual and effective framework for strengthening students' character holistically in state schools amidst the challenges of the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Age Education; Islamic Educational Values; Prophet's Parenting Model; Student Character Education; Qualitative Case Study.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly altered the socialisation patterns of the younger generation and presented new challenges in the character development of students. The digital age, characterised by widespread internet access, the intensity of social media interaction, and the dominance of algorithm-driven information flows, has not only expanded access to knowledge but also given rise to serious risks such as moral ambiguity, cyberbullying, exposure to unethical content, and value relativism. A number of studies indicate that the digital environment has a strong influence on identity formation and the

process of value internalisation among the younger generation (Hadi et al., 2024; Mirza, 2024). This situation suggests that an educational approach focused solely on cognitive development is no longer sufficient; consequently, a reconstruction of the educational paradigm is required, one that systematically places character development at its core.

From the perspective of Islamic education, the aim of education is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but also the development of well-rounded individuals encompassing intellectual, spiritual, emotional and social dimensions, with the ultimate goal of fostering noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*) (Asykur et al., 2025; Briliant & Mustofa, 2025). These values are rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the primary normative sources, as emphasised in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*): "Verily, I have been sent to perfect noble character" (Primarni et al., 2025). Thus, values such as honesty, trustworthiness, compassion and responsibility are not merely normative constructs, but practical principles that are internalised through setting a good example and habituation.

In this study, the Prophet's Parenting Model is positioned as a pedagogical approach based on prophetic values that emphasises compassion, persuasive communication, gradual conditioning (*ta'dib*), and proportionate discipline. This model integrates three main pillars, namely exemplary behaviour (*uswah hasanah*), the internalisation of values through culture and routines, and contextual interactions that are adaptive to the development of learners. Within this framework, character education is not understood as the declarative transmission of values, but rather as a process of meaning-making that takes place continuously within the educational ecosystem.

However, the implementation of character education based on religious values in the context of state schools faces complex conceptual challenges. On the one hand, character education based on universal values has been recognised as a key element in modern education systems. Lickona (2009) asserts that character education is the foundation for building a civilised democratic society. Berkowitz & Bier (2007) demonstrate that the effectiveness of character education depends heavily on its integration into school culture. Meanwhile, Paulus (2020) highlights the importance of a moral development-based approach in the process of internalising values.

On the other hand, in the context of Islamic education, Halstead (2007) asserts that Islamic values are compatible with the modern education system, particularly in strengthening the moral dimension. Almerico (2014) also demonstrates that the integration of character education into the formal curriculum can reinforce a values-based school culture. However, Arthur (2005) highlights the existence of structural tensions in the implementation of character education within secular systems, particularly regarding the boundary between universal values and religious values. These tensions indicate that whilst there is theoretical compatibility, in practice there remain unresolved implementation challenges.

Furthermore, existing empirical studies still exhibit significant limitations. Research on Islam-based character education tends to be concentrated on madrasahs, pesantren, and the pesantren family context (Fathurrohman et al., 2023; Mansir, 2022), and has not yet adequately examined its implementation in pluralistic state schools. Moreover, the majority of research has not yet treated the digital age as a key contextual variable, thereby failing to capture the new complexities in the process of internalising values among the digital generation. Another gap lies in the absence of a conceptual model that systematically translates prophetic values into a framework of universal ethics that is operational within the national education system.

This gap highlights an urgent need to develop a character education model that is not only normative but also contextual, adaptive and inclusive. Without such an approach, character education risks losing its relevance in the face of ever-evolving digital social dynamics.

Based on this, this study aims to: (1) analyse the implementation of the Prophet's Parenting model within the context of state schools; (2) examine the relevance of prophetic values in addressing the challenges of the digital age; and (3) formulate a model for integrating prophetic values within an inclusive and practical framework of universal ethics.

The main contributions of this study lie in three aspects. Firstly, this study expands the scope of research from traditional Islamic education to pluralistic state schools. Secondly, this study integrates the digital era as a structural variable in character formation. Third, this research offers a new conceptual model in the form of a translation of prophetic values into a universal ethical framework that can be systematically implemented within the modern education system. Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the literature but also provides theoretical and practical contributions to the development of values-based character education in the digital age.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a single-case study design, as outlined by Mtisi (2022) and Villamin et al. (2025). This design was chosen to gain an in-depth, contextual, and comprehensive understanding of the integration of the Prophet's Parenting Model in strengthening student character in the digital age within a real-world school setting. The case study approach allows for an intensive exploration of the process of internalising prophetic values such as honesty (*al-sidq*), trustworthiness (*al-amanah*), compassion (*ar-rahmah*), exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*), and self-control in the use of digital media, as applied in the policies, teaching practices, and school culture at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman, Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra.

The research location was selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that the school has a character education programme integrated with religious activities and the cultivation of ethical values among pupils in addressing the challenges of the digital age. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the representation of key stakeholders in the implementation of character education based on prophetic values. There were 12 participants in total, comprising 1 headteacher, 8 teachers from various subjects (Islamic Religious Education, Citizenship Education, Science, and Languages), and 3 pupils who were active in school activities. This composition allowed for the collection of structural and pedagogical perspectives, as well as pupils' direct experiences regarding the integration of the Prophet's parenting model into school life.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentary analysis to ensure data depth and triangulation of sources. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary technique to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in integrating the Prophet's parenting values into the character development of students in the digital age. The interview guide was developed based on a thematic review of the Sunnah, emphasising the values of honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, exemplary behaviour, responsibility, and ethical use of technology. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes, was conducted within the school environment in a conducive atmosphere, recorded with the participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for in-depth analysis.

To supplement the interview data, non-participant observation was conducted in various school settings, including classroom learning processes, student interactions within the school environment and the honesty canteen, religious activities at the school mosque, as well as flag-raising ceremonies and other communal activities. These observations aimed to capture the actual practices of integrating prophetic values into students' pedagogical and social interactions, including in the guidance on the ethical use of digital devices. The researcher used a structured observation sheet recording the time, location, description of the activity, key interactions, and initial codes linking the findings to the Prophet's values of upbringing, such as compassion, trustworthiness, and discipline in the use of technology.

A documentary study was conducted to understand the formal integration of values within school policies and planning. The documents analysed included the school's vision and mission, Lesson Plans, extracurricular activity programmes, school regulations, and policies regarding the use of digital devices. This document analysis served to confirm, expand upon, or test the consistency of findings from interviews and observations, thereby providing a

comprehensive picture of the integration of the Prophet's parenting model in strengthening students' character.

The data obtained from these three sources were analysed using the Thematic Analysis approach as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021), and as referenced in Haan, (2025) and (Afonso et al. 2025). The analysis was conducted systematically across six stages, namely: familiarisation with the data through repeated reading and the writing of analytical memos; initial comprehensive coding of the entire dataset using NVivo 12 software; identification of themes through the grouping of codes sharing similar patterns of meaning; re-examination of themes at the level of data quotations and the entire dataset; conceptual definition and naming of themes; and the drafting of a research report integrating data quotations as empirical evidence. The main themes identified include the cultivation of honesty (*al-sidq*) and trustworthiness, the strengthening of compassion (*ar-rahmah*) and exemplary behaviour, the development of digital ethics and self-control, and the integration of prophetic values into school culture.

Throughout the analysis process, data triangulation was carried out continuously by comparing the results of interviews, observations and documents in order to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings. Research ethics were upheld through the provision of informed consent to all participants, including parental consent for pupils, the use of pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of identities, and the secure storage of data on password-protected devices. Through these methodological procedures, this study provides an in-depth understanding of how the Prophet's parenting model is contextually integrated to strengthen pupils' character in facing the challenges of the digital age at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines in depth how the prophetic parenting model is integrated into educational practice at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman, a state comprehensive secondary school, in response to the challenges of the digital age. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with the headteacher, teachers and pupils, and documentation of school programmes. The findings indicate that the internalisation of prophetic values is not merely normative but is institutionalised within the school culture, pedagogical practices and leadership.

Instilling Honesty (*Al-Sidq*) and Trustworthiness (*Al-Amanah*) as the Pillars of the Institution

1. The Honesty Canteen as a Moral Development Laboratory

The results of the observation indicate that the honesty canteen at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman functions not merely as a supporting facility, but as a space for lived ethics a space consciously designed to instil the fundamental values of the prophetic parenting model, particularly *al-sidq* (honesty) and *al-amanah* (responsibility/trust). During a three-week period of intensive observation, it was found that over 85% of pupils carried out transactions independently without direct supervision, from selecting items, calculating prices, paying, to receiving the correct change. This data not only demonstrates behavioural compliance but also indicates the formation of self-regulated moral behaviour, namely the pupils' ability to control their actions based on internal awareness rather than external pressure.

This practice is reinforced by the teacher's narrative, which states:

"This is our practical training ground for applying trust. We trust them, and they learn to be trustworthy."

This statement carries a very strong pedagogical dimension, namely the transformation of the school's role from merely a transmitter of values to a designer of moral experiences. The trust placed in students is not a form of leniency, but a deliberate educational strategy to build moral agency. In this context, students are not merely 'taught' about honesty, but 'positioned' as moral agents who must make ethical decisions directly in real-life situations.

These findings suggest that the school has successfully established a functioning ethical ecosystem, in which values do not remain merely at the cognitive or normative level, but are brought to life in everyday practice. The honesty canteen serves as a kind of moral microsystem

that allows students to directly experience the consequences of their ethical choices – whether in the form of inner satisfaction from being honest or the potential for guilt if they break the rules. Thus, the process of character education shifts from an instructional approach towards an existential one.

From an educational theory perspective, this practice is highly relevant to the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) proposed by Vygotsky (1978). The honesty canteen provides a structured yet flexible social context, where students can develop their moral reasoning through direct experience supported by the school's collective norms. In this context, the teacher does not act as a supervisor, but as a moral scaffolder who has previously established a framework of values through classroom learning. In other words, the canteen serves as a transitional space from other-regulation to self-regulation in students' moral development.

From an Islamic educational perspective, this practice concretely reflects the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs*, namely the process of purifying and nurturing the soul through repeated practice (*riyadhah*). The values of honesty and trustworthiness are not instilled through lectures alone, but through consistent practice in real-life situations. This aligns with the parenting model of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which emphasises setting an example, trust, and gradual nurturing in shaping the character of his companions. Thus, the honesty canteen can be understood as a form of contextualising prophetic values within a modern school setting.

Furthermore, in the context of the digital age characterised by anonymity, information disruption, and high risks of manipulation (such as plagiarism, the spread of hoaxes, and fake identities) the practice of the honesty canteen holds strategic relevance as a laboratory for digital ethical literacy. The honesty practised in this physical space becomes the foundation for ethical behaviour in the virtual realm. This means that students who are accustomed to being honest in simple, unsupervised transactions will have a stronger tendency to maintain integrity in digital activities that are far more complex and not always monitored. Thus, this practice directly addresses the second research focus, namely affirming the relevance of Islamic values in responding to the challenges of digitalisation.

Furthermore, the consistency of honest behaviour demonstrated by students can also be explained by Bandura & Hall (2018), social learning theory, in which the internalisation of values occurs through the processes of observation, imitation and reinforcement. In this context, students learn not only from personal experience, but also from the behaviour of peers who demonstrate honesty. A canteen environment predominantly characterised by honest behaviour creates positive normative pressure that reinforces the internalisation of these values. This is supported by the findings of previous research by Iyasuremye & Burns, (2025) and Nuha & Gustama, (2024), which confirm that repeated practice within a conducive social environment is a key factor in character formation.

Thus, the honesty canteen at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman functions not only as an innovative school programme but as an integrative model of character education based on prophetic values, successfully combining spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions into a single concrete practice. It serves as evidence that Islamic values can be translated in an applicable, inclusive, and relevant manner within the context of modern education, including in addressing moral complexities in the digital age.

2. Anti Cheating Campaign: Framing Academic Integrity in Spiritual Terms

Interview data indicates that the school's approach to academic integrity is not based solely on punishment, but on the cultivation of an internal and enduring spiritual awareness. Teachers consistently link academic honesty to a moral responsibility towards God (*muraqabah*), namely the awareness that every human action is constantly under divine supervision. This approach is not merely rhetorical but is integrated into daily pedagogical practice. One teacher stated:

“Your grade is not just a number, but a trust of knowledge that you carry.”

This statement carries a strong epistemological dimension, wherein knowledge is not understood as a commodity to be manipulated, but as a trust with moral and spiritual

implications. In follow-up interviews, several students confirmed that this narrative influences how they view examinations, not merely as academic assessments, but as a form of personal accountability. One student stated that they felt “uncomfortable cheating not because of fear of punishment, but because of a sense of inner guilt.”

This approach fundamentally shifts the educational paradigm from external compliance (compliance-based morality) towards internal conscience (conscience-based morality). Whereas in conventional approaches, honest behaviour is often triggered by external controls such as strict supervision and the threat of sanctions, in this model, such controls are transformed into value-based self-regulation. This aligns with moral development theory, which identifies the internalisation of values as an indicator of moral maturity.

Observations during the examination process reinforce this. Teachers do not merely act as administrative supervisors but also as facilitators of moral awareness. Before the examination begins, teachers routinely reinforce values through brief advice emphasising the importance of honesty as part of faith. This practice creates a different psychological atmosphere compared to examination situations that merely emphasise discipline and order. In some cases, physical supervision appeared minimal, yet the incidence of breaches remained low, indicating the success of value internalisation.

Theoretically, this strategy can be understood as the integration of various moral foundations as proposed by Haidt (2012), particularly the dimensions of sanctity and fairness (Ningsih, 2025). Honesty is understood not only as a social obligation, but also as a means of preserving one’s own sanctity from dishonest acts. This is reinforced by the findings of Silver et al., (2025) and Zangari et al., (2025), which indicate that a moral approach based on transcendental values tends to be more effective in shaping long-term ethical behaviour than an approach based solely on rules.

From an Islamic educational perspective, this approach represents the realisation of the concept of *adab*, namely the awareness of placing things in their proper context, including in the acquisition and application of knowledge. Thus, academic integrity is not only related to behaviour, but also to one’s perspective on knowledge itself. This demonstrates that the Prophet’s parenting model is contextualised within educational practice in state schools, without resorting to an exclusive or doctrinal approach, but rather through the internalisation of universal values.

Furthermore, in the context of the digital age, characterised by rising instances of plagiarism, the unethical use of artificial intelligence, and the spread of disinformation, this approach is highly relevant. Academic integrity is no longer sufficient to be understood merely as compliance with school rules, but must become part of an individual’s moral identity capable of guiding student behaviour in a digital space with minimal external control. In other words, the value of *muraqabah* functions as an ‘internal monitoring mechanism’ that continues to operate even when individuals are in an anonymous state in the digital world.

Thus, academic integrity in this context is not positioned merely as an administrative rule, but as an internalised moral identity. Students do not merely learn not to cheat, but understand why honesty is existentially important. These findings confirm that the integration of prophetic values into education can produce a character-building model that is not only pedagogically effective but also adaptable to the ethical challenges of the digital age.

Instilling Compassion (*Ar-Rahmah*) and Mutual Respect (*Al-Ihtiram*) as the Norms of Relationships

1. Teacher-Pupil Interaction: From Punitive Discipline to Pedagogical Discipline

Classroom observation data and student interviews indicate that a paradigm shift has taken place in disciplinary practices within schools, moving away from a repressive approach that emphasises punishment, control and external compliance, towards a restorative and empathetic approach focused on the restoration of relationships, moral awareness and character development. This transformation is not merely technical in terms of methods for handling misconduct, but also reflects a fundamental shift in how teachers perceive their pupils: from objects to be controlled to moral agents who need guidance and whose dignity must be respected.

In concrete classroom practice, teachers no longer use public exposure-based disciplinary strategies such as scolding or humiliating pupils in front of their peers, which numerous studies have shown to potentially cause psychological distress, reduced self-esteem, and resistance to authority. Instead, teachers adopt a private correction approach, which involves delivering reprimands personally in a calmer, more dialogic atmosphere. This approach facilitates two-way communication, where students not only receive a reprimand but are also given space to explain, reflect on, and understand their mistakes.

This is reinforced by a student's statement:

"If we make a mistake, the teacher usually calls us aside privately and advises us kindly, so we don't feel humiliated."

This statement indicates that students feel a sense of psychological safety within the learning environment. This sense of safety is a crucial prerequisite for the development of openness and trust between students and teachers. Without the social threat of feeling ashamed in public, students are more likely to accept correction and are better prepared to make conscious behavioural changes, rather than acting out of external pressure.

This approach substantially reflects the value of *rahmah* (compassion) in the Prophet's parenting model, where correction of mistakes is not carried out in a demeaning manner, but rather by preserving the dignity (*hifz al-'ird*) of the individual. In many narrations, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) demonstrated an educational approach that prioritises gentleness, empathy, and contextual appropriateness when addressing mistakes. In the context of modern education, this principle can be understood as a form of dignity-preserving pedagogy, namely an approach that places the learner's self-esteem at the centre of the learning process and character development.

Empirically, this approach has been shown to impact two key aspects. Firstly, an increase in students' openness when interacting with teachers, both in academic and personal contexts. Students no longer view teachers as intimidating authoritarian figures, but as supportive mentors. Secondly, a reduction in resistance to school rules. The compliance that develops is no longer coercive in nature, but rather based on internalised discipline, which in moral development theory is considered a higher level.

From a contemporary educational perspective, this practice contributes significantly to the development of emotional intelligence, particularly in the aspects of self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy. When students are treated with empathy, they learn to replicate this pattern in their social interactions. Furthermore, this approach also strengthens moral sensitivity, which is the ability to recognise the moral dimensions of a situation and respond to them appropriately.

According to Hendratno et al., (2026), these two competencies are an integral part of the 21st-century skills that are so badly needed in the digital age. In a digital space often characterised by anonymity, deindividuation and low social accountability, the ability to maintain empathy and moral awareness is becoming increasingly crucial. Thus, the practice of empathetic discipline implemented in schools is not only relevant in the context of face-to-face interactions, but also serves as an ethical foundation for pupils' behaviour in virtual spaces.

In other words, this transformation of the disciplinary approach does not merely result in classroom order, but also shapes a more mature, reflective, and adaptive moral character in pupils, enabling them to navigate the complexities of social challenges, including within the ever-evolving digital landscape.

2. Community Culture and Recovery Practices

The school does not rely solely on a normative approach to character development, but systematically develops pedagogical mechanisms based on social relationships, namely through a peer-mentoring system and the application of restorative discipline. Documentation and interview findings indicate that minor infractions such as tardiness, non-compliance with classroom rules, or conflicts between peers are not immediately met with conventional punishments, but are instead channelled into a reflective and educational process. Pupils are asked to write a personal reflection on the mistake they have made, identify its impact on themselves and others, and formulate a commitment to improvement. In some cases, pupils are

also involved in social activities such as helping to keep the school environment clean or supporting peers who need academic assistance.

This approach reflects a paradigm shift from punitive discipline towards restorative discipline, where the primary focus is not on retribution for offences, but on the restoration of social relationships and the reconstruction of moral consciousness. Within the framework of reintegrative shaming (Forsyth & Braithwaite, 2020), this practice treats wrongdoing as a behaviour that can be corrected without attaching a negative stigma to the offender's identity. Thus, students remain accepted as part of the community, yet are encouraged to take moral responsibility for their actions. This has proven effective in reducing the recurrence of offences, as expressed by a guidance counsellor who noted that "students given the opportunity to improve themselves tend to be more mindful and do not repeat the same mistakes."

From an Islamic educational perspective, this practice is closely linked to the concepts of *ta'dib* (the educational process of instilling good manners) and *islah* (reformation or reconciliation). Discipline is not understood merely as external control, but as a process of internalising values that shapes self-awareness (self-regulation). This approach reflects the educational methods of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which emphasised gentleness, dialogue, and gradual guidance in addressing mistakes, so that students not only know that an action is wrong, but also understand why and how to correct it.

Furthermore, the cross-age mentoring system developed by the school reinforces the social dimension of character education. Senior pupils act as mentors to junior pupils, both informally and through structured programmes, covering both academic and behavioural aspects. Observations indicate that these interactions foster more egalitarian and supportive relationships, in which pupils feel more comfortable sharing their problems with peers than with teachers. Within the framework of Tong & An, (2024), developmental ecology theory, this practice strengthens the mesosystem that is, the interconnectedness of social environments that directly influence individual development (Garton, Grimm, & Kim, 2021).

Thus, the value of *rahmah* (compassion) is not merely a moral discourse but is institutionalised within the school's social structure. Relationships between students are not built on a hierarchy of power, but on the principles of care, mutual assistance, and collective responsibility. This creates what is referred to in educational studies as a 'caring community', namely a learning community characterised by emotional closeness and a commitment to shared well-being.

More broadly, these findings suggest that the Prophet's parenting model possesses a high degree of conceptual flexibility for translation into the language of universal ethics. Values such as *rahmah*, *ta'dib*, and *islah* can be reformulated into globally recognised principles, such as empathy, respect for individual dignity, social responsibility, and restorative justice. This transformation is particularly significant in the context of pluralistic and inclusive state schools, as it enables Islamic values to be implemented not through theological exclusivity, but as a universal and contextual ethical foundation.

Furthermore, in the context of the digital age, characterised by rising social conflict in virtual spaces (cyberbullying, hate speech, and polarisation), this approach to mentoring and restorative discipline holds strategic relevance. Pupils are not only trained to resolve conflicts directly in the real world, but are also equipped with social-emotional competencies that can be transferred to digital interactions. In this way, schools succeed in integrating prophetic values into educational practices that are adaptive to the challenges of the times, whilst strengthening pupils' character as empathetic, responsible individuals capable of building healthy social relationships.

Manifested in the Pursuit of Knowledge (*Thalab al-'Ilmi*) and Cleanliness (*An-Nadhafah*)

1. Learning as Worship: Spiritual Integration in Epistemology

Research data indicates that the construction of the meaning of learning as part of worship at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman does not stop at ritual symbolism, but is internalised within the overall pedagogical process. Practices such as prayer before lessons, the reinforcement of intention (*niyyah*), and teachers' narratives that explicitly link academic activities to spiritual values, shape students' cognitive and affective frameworks so that learning is not merely an

academic activity, but rather part of devotion to God. In classroom observations, for instance, teachers do not merely deliver content but also link lesson material to life's wisdom and purpose, thereby integrating the cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude), and spiritual (transcendental meaning) dimensions.

This approach significantly contributes to strengthening students' intrinsic motivation. Unlike extrinsic motivation, which relies on grades, rankings, or external rewards, the motivation fostered through this spiritual framework is more sustainable. Interview results indicate that students are beginning to perceive learning as a personal need and a moral responsibility, rather than merely an institutional obligation. One student remarked that "learning feels more important because it is part of worship, not just for exams." This statement indicates a shift in learning orientation from performance-oriented to purpose-oriented learning, which in educational psychology literature is regarded as an indicator of motivational maturity.

Theoretically, these findings are strongly consistent with the thought of Imam Al-Ghazālī, (1982) in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which emphasises that the value of knowledge is largely determined by the seeker's intention and orientation. From Al-Ghazālī's perspective, knowledge sought with the right intention leads to closeness to God and the cultivation of moral character. This concept finds relevance in contemporary motivation theory, particularly the meaning-making approach, which emphasises that individuals will demonstrate higher levels of engagement in learning when they are able to link learning activities to broader, meaningful life goals (Bohlmeijer et al., 2023). Thus, the integration of spiritual values into learning is not merely of theological value, but also possesses psychological and pedagogical validity.

Furthermore, in the context of the digital age, characterised by an information overload, high levels of distraction, and a crisis of meaning, this approach serves as a moral anchor for students. As technology provides unlimited access to a wide range of content both constructive and destructive – students require an internal value framework capable of guiding the process of selecting and using technology ethically. Research findings indicate that students who view learning as a form of worship tend to be more selective in their use of digital devices, avoid negative content, and utilise technology for productive purposes such as seeking study references or deepening their understanding of religion.

Thus, framing learning as worship not only strengthens students' spiritual dimension but also functions as a self-regulation mechanism in facing digital challenges. This underscores that the integration of prophetic values into learning holds strong relevance in addressing the problem of value disorientation in the digital age, whilst offering an educational model that not only intellectually enlightens but also provides moral and spiritual guidance.

2. Cleanliness as a Spiritual and Environmental Practice

Field observations indicate that hygiene practices within the school environment are not merely instructional in nature, but have evolved into a collective moral culture involving the entire school community from the headteacher and teachers to support staff and pupils. This involvement is evident in daily routines such as class duty, weekly community service, and spontaneous responses to environmental conditions (for example, pupils independently picking up litter without being asked). This indicates that hygiene has undergone a process of internalisation as a value, rather than merely compliance with formal rules.

The role of teachers in this context extends beyond that of a provider of normative instructions; they function as moral agents and living models who embody these values through concrete actions. This exemplary behaviour reinforces the effectiveness of character education through observational learning, whereby students learn not only from what is taught, but from what is consistently demonstrated in daily practice. In an interview, one teacher emphasised:

"Keeping our environment clean is a scientific necessity and an embodiment of our faith."

This statement reflects the epistemological integration of the rational-scientific and spiritual-religious dimensions within the framework of *tawhid* (the unity of knowledge). Cleanliness is not positioned merely as a matter of health or environmental aesthetics, but also as a manifestation of faith and human responsibility as *khalifah fil ardh*. Thus, the practice of

cleanliness becomes a meeting point between environmental literacy and spiritual consciousness.

This approach is in line with the modern environmental education paradigm, which emphasises the integration of knowledge, attitudes and behaviour Sutomo (2021), however, in this context, it is reinforced by a theological foundation that lends a deeper dimension of meaning. This integration is crucial in the digital age, where ecological crises are often triggered by an exploitative mindset detached from moral and spiritual values.

Furthermore, a clean, well-organised, and well-managed school environment functions as a hidden curriculum an implicit curriculum that shapes students' character through daily experiences. In this context, the physical space of the school acts as a pedagogical space that indirectly instils values of discipline, responsibility, and social concern. Pupils accustomed to a clean and orderly environment tend to develop similar behavioural standards, both within and outside school.

These findings demonstrate that prophetic values, particularly those relating to cleanliness (an-nadhafah) and ecological responsibility, can be operationally translated into universal practices that are inclusive and cross-cultural. Concern for the environment is not merely a local or religious imperative, but also a global issue relevant to the sustainable development agenda. Thus, the integration of prophetic values into school hygiene practices not only contributes to the character development of pupils, but also prepares them to become global citizens with ecological awareness and moral responsibility in the digital age.

Harmonising Factors: The Role of Leadership and Setting a Good Example (*Al-Qudwah Hasanah*)

1. The Headteacher as a Moral Role Model

Field observation data indicates that headteachers do not merely act as formal administrators, but also as central figures in shaping the school's moral culture through consistent and authentic exemplary behaviour. Behaviours such as arriving on time, being directly involved in maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment, and actively participating in religious activities such as congregational prayer and spiritual guidance are not incidental, but rather structured and recurring in daily life. This consistency forms what is referred to in organisational culture studies as symbolic leadership, wherein the leader's actions become living symbols of values that are emulated by the entire school community.

Furthermore, the institution's moral credibility is not built solely through written regulations, but through alignment between communicated values (espoused values) and actual behaviour (enacted values). In this context, the headteacher functions as a "living curriculum" who embodies values in concrete and observable forms. Interview data with teachers indicate that this exemplary behaviour has a strong legitimising effect on school policies. Teachers tend to internalise and reproduce these values more readily in teaching practice because they observe direct examples from the leadership. Thus, a continuity of values is established from the leadership level to the pedagogical level.

Within the framework of Bandura & Hall, (2018), social learning theory, this phenomenon is explained through the concept of observational learning, whereby individuals learn through the process of observing, imitating and internalising the behaviour of models who are regarded as credible and authoritative. The headteacher, in this case, meets the criteria of a salient model due to their structural position, high visibility and consistent behaviour. Pupils and teachers do not merely receive verbal instructions regarding values, but witness first-hand how these values are manifested in concrete actions. This process reinforces the retention and reproduction of behaviour, whilst simultaneously enhancing motivation to emulate the model due to the alignment between words and deeds.

Meanwhile, from an Islamic educational perspective, this practice is known as *uswah hasanah*, that is, exemplary conduct as the primary method in character formation. This concept is rooted in the prophetic tradition, in which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is positioned as the ideal model whose behaviour serves as a reference for the community. In the school context, the headteacher embodies this prophetic role on an institutional scale. The exemplary conduct demonstrated is not merely of a normative-religious nature, but is also

translated into universal values such as responsibility, integrity, and social concern, thereby ensuring it is inclusively accepted within the state school environment.

The implications of this practice are highly significant for the successful internalisation of values. Data indicates that pupils are more likely to adopt disciplined and responsible behaviour when they observe authority figures consistently practising these traits. Similarly, teachers develop a stronger ethical commitment because they feel part of a community where values are genuinely lived out. Thus, the headteacher's exemplary conduct functions not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a cultural mechanism that integrates values into the entire school ecosystem.

Conceptually, these findings confirm that effective value internalisation requires a relationship-based approach and practical application, rather than mere cognitive transmission. When values are presented through credible and consistent figures, the internalisation process moves from the stage of awareness towards habituation, and ultimately becomes part of the individual's moral identity. In the context of this research, the exemplary conduct of the headteacher is a key factor bridging the gap between the concept of prophetic parenting and its implementation in modern education, particularly in addressing the challenges of character degradation in the digital age.

2. Distributed Moral Leadership

Interviews with teachers not only revealed normative statements regarding the importance of setting a good example, but also demonstrated a collectively internalised reflective awareness amongst educators that the legitimacy of character education rests on consistency between the values taught and the behaviour displayed. The statement:

"We cannot demand honesty and compassion from our students if we do not demonstrate them ourselves."

represents a form of moral self-awareness as well as ethical accountability in teachers' professional practice. This means that teachers no longer position themselves merely as transmitters of norms, but as moral agents who serve as the primary reference point in the process of learning values. In this context, exemplary behaviour is not merely a pedagogical strategy, but becomes the epistemological foundation of character education, where values are understood through relational experiences, not merely through verbal instruction.

Furthermore, these findings indicate the emergence of what is referred to in educational leadership literature as 'distributed moral leadership' Fabian et al., (2022) and Ling, Bai, Li, & Yang, (2023). This concept marks a shift from a hierarchical leadership model towards a more participatory and collegial model, where moral authority is not centred solely on the headteacher, but is distributed across all educational actors – teachers, staff, and even students. In practice at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman, this is evident in the consistency of teachers' behaviour across various situations, both inside and outside the classroom, such as maintaining administrative integrity, treating students with respect, and demonstrating empathy in daily interactions. Thus, values such as *al-sidq* and *ar-rahmah* are not merely taught as concepts, but are socially reproduced through repeated and meaningful interactions.

This distribution of moral leadership also creates what is known in the sociology of education as a 'moral community' – a social environment that collectively maintains and reinforces ethical norms. In such an ecosystem, social control is no longer external and coercive, but evolves into internal control based on shared consciousness, so that students are motivated to behave ethically not out of fear of punishment, but because they feel part of a community that upholds those values.

From an Islamic perspective, this phenomenon has a strong correspondence with the concept of *jama'ah*, namely a collective unity built upon shared values, goals, and responsibilities. Education within the framework of *jama'ah* is not individualistic, but emphasises the importance of social synergy in the formation of character. Every individual within the community plays the role of an *uswah hasanah* (good example) for others, so that the educational process takes place both horizontally and vertically. This aligns with the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, which positions all members of the community as active agents in upholding and enforcing values.

Thus, these findings reinforce the argument that the success of integrating the Prophet's parenting model in schools is determined not only by the formal curriculum, but by the moral ecology of the institution built through collective exemplarity. In the context of the digital age, characterised by a crisis of authority and the fragmentation of values, this community-based model of distributed moral leadership is particularly relevant, as it is capable of providing the authentic, consistent, and contextual moral authority that pupils need to navigate the complexities of modern life.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that:

1. The Prophet's parenting model has been successfully implemented in the context of state schools through the institutionalisation of values in practical terms, rather than merely as normative discourse.
2. Islamic values have proven to be relevant in addressing the challenges of the digital age, particularly in fostering integrity, empathy and responsibility.
3. The model of prophetic value integration can be translated into universal ethical terms such as honesty, compassion, and restorative justice, making it inclusive and applicable within the context of modern education.

Thus, SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman represents a model of prophetic educational ecology, where values are not merely taught but brought to life throughout the entire school system – structure, relationships, practices, and leadership as a strategic response to the crisis of character in the digital age.

DISCUSSION

This research offers significant uniqueness and novelty compared to previous studies on character education. Its primary novelty lies in the integration of the prophetic parenting model into the school educational ecosystem, which is positioned not merely as a normative approach, but as a mechanism for transforming moral behaviour based on experience, spirituality, and systemic role modelling. Unlike research that tends to place character education within a purely psychological or social framework, this study emphasises the transcendental dimension (*muraqabah*) as a key variable linking moral consciousness with students' internal self-control in the context of the digital age.

The main findings of this research indicate that the integration of the Prophet's parenting model is capable of transforming the values of honesty (*al-ṣidq*) and trustworthiness (*al-amānah*) from mere declarative norms into the daily practices of students. Programmes such as the "honesty canteen" function as a moral laboratory based on experiential learning, enabling students to directly experience the ethical consequences of their actions. Thus, the internalisation of values does not stop at the cognitive level, but develops into habit formation based on reflective moral consciousness, which strengthens integrity in actual behaviour.

When compared with previous studies, these findings align with research that positions the school environment as a moral ecosystem determining the success of character education (Kamaludin & Rizal, 2025), as well as the importance of a systemic approach in character formation (Birhan et al., 2021). This consistency can be explained by the shared assumption that social and institutional environments act as the primary agents of value internalisation. However, a fundamental difference in this study lies in the addition of the dimensions of prophetic exemplarity and Islamic spirituality, which are not merely socio-cultural but also theological in nature.

Another difference is influenced by the research context, as this study was conducted within an educational environment that explicitly integrates religious values. Whilst previous research has largely focused on character-based approaches within general education policy, this study emphasises that the effectiveness of character education is enhanced when supported by the internalisation of divine values that are permanent and transcendent.

From a theoretical perspective, the successful implementation of this model can be explained through social learning theory, which emphasises observation and imitation of role models, as well as the concept of prophetic exemplarity (*uswah*). In the context of the Prophet's upbringing, the values of honesty and trustworthiness were not merely taught verbally, but

brought to life through consistent practice in daily life. This resulted in learners not only 'knowing' the values, but also 'internalising' and 'actualising' them in concrete actions.

These findings are also consistent with research emphasising the importance of integrating spiritual aspects into values education (Sumiharsono et al., 2023) and the effectiveness of religious approaches in shaping students' moral decisions (Hariandi et al., 2020). However, the distinctive contribution of this study is the assertion that the concept of *muraqabah* (awareness of God's supervision) functions as a more stable internal control mechanism compared to external control, particularly in facing the challenges of the digital age characterised by a lack of direct supervision.

Furthermore, anti-cheating campaigns integrated with the concept of *muraqabah* have proven capable of shifting students' behavioural orientation from external compliance towards internal commitment. This transformation demonstrates that the Prophet's parenting model operates not only at the behavioural level but also in the restructuring of moral motivation. Transcendental awareness positions academic integrity as part of a spiritual responsibility, rather than merely institutional compliance.

These findings reinforce the literature emphasising the importance of integrating spirituality into character education (Sumiharsono et al., 2023; Hariandi et al., 2020), whilst expanding upon it by positioning *muraqabah* as a central variable in the development of academic ethics in the digital age. This constitutes a significant contribution as most previous studies have not explicitly examined spiritual mechanisms as a means of regulating academic behaviour within the context of digital technology.

In another respect, this study found a paradigm shift from a repressive disciplinary approach towards an empathy-based pedagogical approach that reflects the values of *rahmah* (compassion) and *ihtirām* (mutual respect). This shift demonstrates that character development is more effectively achieved through a humanistic approach that emphasises dialogue, personal guidance, and restorative discipline. Theoretically, these findings can be explained through Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, particularly regarding the mesosystemic interaction between teachers and students.

These findings are consistent with UNESCO reports on the importance of positive relationships in creating a healthy school climate (Sari et al., 2025; Muttaqin, 2023), as well as research demonstrating the link between empathy and prosocial behaviour (Banawi et al., 2025). These similarities indicate that positive social relationships are a universal factor in character education. However, this study makes an additional contribution by demonstrating that the internalisation of the values of *rahmah* and *ihtirām* through prophetic exemplarity yields more stable and sustainable social cohesion, particularly in the context of digital interaction challenges such as cyberbullying.

In another aspect, the integration of the values of *ṭalab al-'ilmi* (the pursuit of knowledge) as a form of worship and *naẓāfah* (cleanliness) as part of faith demonstrates that education based on the Prophet's teachings is capable of building a holistic educational framework. Learning activities are not merely understood as academic achievements, but also as a process of meaning-making that unites spiritual, rational, and practical dimensions.

These findings align with studies emphasising the importance of integrating values into learning (Septiwiharti et al., 2024). However, this research expands upon this perspective by asserting that the integration of religious and scientific values yields a more complete holistic awareness, which not only enhances learning motivation but also strengthens students' ethical orientation in daily life.

Furthermore, the success of implementing this model is largely determined by the moral leadership and exemplary conduct (*al-qudwah al-ḥasanah*) of the headteacher and teachers. From a social cognitive theory perspective, exemplary conduct serves as the primary mechanism in observational learning. In a prophetic context, exemplary conduct functions not merely as a method, but as the epistemological core of character education itself. These findings reinforce previous research emphasising the importance of exemplary behaviour in character education (Kamaludin & Rizal, 2025), whilst simultaneously expanding upon it by

demonstrating that prophetic value-based exemplary behaviour yields deeper internalisation as it simultaneously integrates cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the integration of the Prophet's parenting model fosters a comprehensive character education ecosystem through four key mechanisms: experience-based internalisation, moral-spiritual integration, empathetic relationships, and exemplary leadership. This combination produces a character education model that is not only adaptable to the challenges of the digital age but also possesses a strong ethical and spiritual foundation. Nevertheless, this study has limitations in the local context of SMPN 1 Payaraman and its qualitative approach, meaning that the generalisability of the findings remains limited. Therefore, further research is recommended to test this model quantitatively, expand the cultural context and educational levels, and develop a more systematic curriculum model based on prophetic nurturing. Thus, this study not only enriches the literature on character education but also offers a new conceptual framework for integrating prophetic values into modern education that is responsive to digital disruption.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, this study confirms that the Prophet's parenting model, rooted in Muhammad's exemplary conduct, has been systematically internalised at SMP Negeri 1 Payaraman through cultural and structural integration that extends beyond formal Islamic Religious Education lessons and encompasses the entire school ecosystem. This implementation is realised through structured programmes (such as the 'Canteen of Honesty' as a laboratory of integrity), dialogical and empathetic pedagogical interactions, as well as consistent exemplary behaviour (*qudwah hasanah*) from the leadership and teachers, so that the prophetic values of *al-ṣidq*, *amanah*, *raḥmah*, *iḥtirām*, *ṭalab al-ʿilm*, and *naẓāfah* are transformed into living social practices within the school culture. In the context of the digital age, these values have proven to be adaptive and operational as the foundation of digital communication ethics, information literacy, and academic integrity amidst disruption and disinformation, whilst being translated into the language of universal ethics such as integrity, responsibility, empathy, and respect, which are compatible with the inclusive character of state schools. Conceptually, this study offers a model for the integration of prophetic values based on school moral ecology, which synergises policy, culture, and personal exemplarity as reinforcements of the hidden curriculum in shaping student character in the digital age; however, as this is a single-case study, further comparative and mixed-method research is required to test its replicability and quantitative impact. The author expresses gratitude to the entire school community for their administrative and technical support throughout the research, and declares that there are no conflicts of interest in this publication.

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