

The Construction of Students' Religious Character Through English Language Learning: A Study at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the importance of strengthening students' religious character amid globalization and the growing need for English language proficiency at the elementary school level. However, the integration of religious values into English language learning remains limited, resulting in insufficient support for students' religious character development. Therefore, this study aimed to describe the integration of religious values into English language learning and to analyze the construction of students' religious character at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency. This research employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The participants consisted of the principal, English teacher, and students. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that religious values were integrated into English language learning through teaching materials, learning methods, classroom interactions, and positive behavioral habituation. The construction of students' religious character occurred through teacher role modeling, religious habituation, reinforcement of positive behavior, and meaningful learning experiences. The religious values developed among students included honesty, discipline, responsibility, gratitude, cooperation, and mutual respect. English language learning was found not only to improve students' language competence but also to contribute significantly to the development of their religious character. Therefore, the integration of religious values into English language learning should be continuously promoted to achieve a balanced educational process that fosters both academic achievement and character development.

Keywords: Character, Learning, Education, School, Religious

INTRODUCTION

Education is essentially not only oriented toward the development of students' cognitive abilities but also aims to shape positive character traits as a provision for social life. In the context of Indonesian education, strengthening religious character has become one of the primary priorities promoted across various educational levels, including elementary schools. Religious character is understood as attitudes and behaviors that reflect faith, piety, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and social concern based on religious values. Therefore, the learning process in schools is expected not only to produce intellectually competent students but also to develop individuals with strong moral character and noble conduct (Retnasari, 2023).

Along with the advancement of globalization, English language learning has become an essential component of education. English is no longer viewed merely as a subject aimed at improving communication skills; it also serves as a means of broadening students' global perspectives. However, the rapid flow of information and global culture through the use of foreign languages often raises concerns about the declining attention to moral and religious values. This situation necessitates the integration of language competence with character education that reflects the cultural and religious values of Indonesian society (Munawir, 2024).

English language learning has significant potential to serve as a medium for developing students' religious character. Through the selection of teaching materials, reading texts, discussions, inspirational stories, and other learning activities, teachers can contextualize religious values within the learning process. As noted by Ratnawati et al. (2024), values such as honesty, discipline, gratitude, cooperation, mutual respect, and social

care can be incorporated into English language learning activities without diminishing the primary objectives of language instruction. Consequently, the learning process becomes more meaningful because it focuses not only on linguistic competence but also on character development.

The concept of religious character construction refers to the continuous process of shaping students' values, attitudes, and behaviors through interactions within their learning environment. From a constructivist perspective, character is not formed instantly but is gradually constructed through learning experiences, teacher role modeling, social interactions, and consistent habituation. Therefore, English language learning can become a strategic platform for fostering religious character when designed through an integrative approach that emphasizes value reinforcement (Akbar, 2025).

Previous studies have shown that the integration of character education into learning processes positively affects students' attitudes and behaviors. Studies have found that the implementation of character values in learning activities enhances students' moral awareness and sense of responsibility (Prasetyo, 2023; Retnasari, 2023; Fitriah et al., 2025). Other studies have also highlighted the crucial role of teachers in connecting learning materials with life values, enabling students to understand learning in a broader context. These findings indicate that the success of character education is strongly influenced by the instructional strategies employed by teachers (Prasetyo, 2023).

In the context of English language learning, most previous studies have focused primarily on improving language skills such as speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Meanwhile, studies specifically examining the construction of religious character through English language learning at the elementary school level remain limited. This gap is significant because elementary school years represent a crucial stage in character formation, during which students experience substantial moral, social, and spiritual development. The limited number of studies in this area highlights the need for further investigation (Ratnawati et al., 2024).

SD Negeri Lombasang in Gowa Regency is one of the elementary schools that actively integrates character education into various learning activities. In addition to emphasizing academic achievement, the school places considerable attention on character development through religious-based programs and school culture. In English language instruction, teachers not only deliver linguistic content but also connect learning materials with moral and religious values relevant to students' daily lives. Such practices provide an interesting context for exploring how the process of religious character construction takes place within the school environment.

This phenomenon suggests that English language learning can function as an educational instrument that not only develops language proficiency but also strengthens students' identity and character. Through the use of examples closely related to students' lives, the inclusion of moral messages in learning materials, and the habituation of positive attitudes during classroom activities, religious values can be instilled naturally and continuously. Such an approach aligns with modern educational paradigms that position character formation as an integral part of the learning process (Ratnawati et al., 2024).

The urgency of this study becomes even more evident in the digital era, where educational challenges are increasingly complex. Today's students live in an environment heavily influenced by social media, information technology, and global culture, which do not always align with the religious values embraced by society. Therefore, schools need to implement learning strategies capable of balancing twenty-first-century competencies with strong character formation. English language learning integrated with religious values offers a promising alternative for addressing these challenges (Fitriah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the development of religious character through English language learning is consistent with national educational policies that emphasize character development as an integral part of education. Within a student-centered learning framework, teachers are expected to provide learning experiences that foster not only academic competence but also moral and spiritual awareness. Consequently,

integrating religious values into English language instruction represents a relevant strategy for achieving holistic and sustainable educational goals (Ciptaningrum et al., 2025).

The phenomenon observed at SD Negeri Lombasang demonstrates a positive tendency toward integrating religious values into English language learning. Although English is often perceived as a subject associated with global language and culture, classroom practices at this school reveal teachers' efforts to connect learning materials with religious values embedded in students' social environments. On the one hand, students are encouraged to develop language proficiency as preparation for future challenges; on the other hand, they are guided to uphold religious values in their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy because it indicates that English language learning does not necessarily weaken students' religious identity; rather, it can effectively strengthen religious character when appropriately designed and implemented by teachers (Akbar, 2025).

Pedagogically, English language learning possesses characteristics that allow for a more flexible process of value internalization compared to several other subjects. Activities such as reading texts, engaging in dialogues, role-playing, storytelling, and group discussions provide broad opportunities for teachers to embed religious values in authentic and understandable contexts. Through these activities, students not only learn language structures and vocabulary but also develop an understanding of the moral messages contained within the learning materials (Fardita et al., 2022).

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the relationship between English language learning and the construction of religious character among elementary school students within the local context of Gowa Regency. Previous studies have largely emphasized the effectiveness of English language learning in improving language competence, while research exploring its role in fostering religious character remains limited. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a new perspective on the importance of integrating religious character education into English language learning while enriching the body of knowledge in elementary education concerning the balanced development of competence and character (Prasetyo, 2023).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study seeks to examine in depth how students' religious character is constructed through English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of concepts related to character education and language learning integration, while also providing practical implications for teachers, schools, and educational policymakers in designing learning processes that not only enhance language competence but also strengthen students' religious character as a foundation for facing future challenges (Ratnawati et al., 2024).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore in depth the construction of students' religious character through English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to understand the phenomenon holistically within its natural school setting (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The study was conducted at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, in 2026 and involved the school principal, the English teacher, and students as research participants. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in the learning process and religious character development activities within the school environment.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine the English language learning process and identify forms of religious value internalization that emerged during classroom activities. In-depth interviews were carried out with the principal, the English teacher, and students to obtain comprehensive information regarding instructional strategies, learning experiences, and the role of English language learning in shaping students' religious character. In addition, documentation in the form of teaching modules, instructional materials, activity photographs, and school documents was utilized to complement and strengthen the data obtained from observations and interviews (Taherdoost, 2022).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2020). The collected data were selected, categorized, and descriptively presented to identify patterns and meanings related to the construction of students' religious character. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation. The research process was carried out systematically through several stages, including research preparation, data collection, data analysis, and report writing, resulting in valid and comprehensive findings regarding the construction of religious character through English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Integration of Religious Values in English Language Learning

The findings revealed, based on classroom observations, interviews with the English teacher and the school principal, and analysis of instructional documents, that the English teacher at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, had integrated religious values into the learning process through various instructional activities. This integration was carried out by connecting English language materials with religious values that were closely related to students' daily lives. During classroom instruction, students were encouraged to begin and end learning activities with prayers, use positive expressions containing moral values, and engage with inspirational stories that promoted honesty, responsibility, gratitude, and concern for others. In addition, vocabulary materials and reading texts were frequently associated with religious practices and commendable behaviors that could be applied in everyday life (field observation, Interview with the English Teacher, and School Documents, 2026).

Interviews with the English teacher indicated that the integration of religious values was not implemented separately from the learning materials but was naturally embedded in every learning activity. The teacher deliberately selected sentence examples, dialogues, and reading materials containing moral messages so that students could understand not only the meaning of the language but also the life values conveyed through it. According to the teacher, this approach enabled students to understand the learning materials more easily because they were connected to experiences encountered in their daily lives.

In vocabulary learning activities, the teacher often introduced words related to worship practices, commendable attitudes, and positive social relationships. For example, students learned vocabulary such as *honesty*, *gratitude*, *respect*, *kindness*, and *responsibility*, which were then linked to real-life behaviors within school and family environments. Through these activities, students not only expanded their English vocabulary but also developed an understanding of the importance of applying these values in their everyday lives (Fardita et al., 2022).

In reading activities, the teacher utilized simple texts containing stories about good behavior, social care, and positive habits that aligned with religious teachings. After reading the texts, students were asked to identify the moral messages contained in them and discuss these messages with their classmates. This activity encouraged students to think critically while reflecting on religious values that could be implemented in their daily lives (Miranda, 2025).

The observational findings also demonstrated that the learning environment supported the development of students' religious character. The teacher provided opportunities for students to respect one another's opinions, collaborate in groups, and demonstrate polite behavior throughout the learning process. Whenever differences of opinion emerged, students were guided to resolve them respectfully and courteously. These findings indicate that religious values were not only taught through instructional materials but were also cultivated through the classroom learning culture established by the teacher.

Furthermore, religious habituation was evident in the verbal interactions used during classroom instruction. The teacher frequently provided positive reinforcement through expressions reflecting gratitude,

motivation, and appreciation for students' efforts. Students were also encouraged to use respectful and polite language when communicating with both teachers and peers. This habituation indirectly contributed to the formation of religious character, which was reflected in students' daily behavior and communication patterns (Solihah et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings indicate that the integration of religious values into English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang was implemented systematically through learning materials, teaching methods, classroom interactions, and the school culture. This integration provided meaningful learning experiences that not only enhanced students' language proficiency but also strengthened their understanding and internalization of religious values. Therefore, English language learning functioned as an educational medium that supported both academic competence development and the formation of students' religious character.

Construction of Students' Religious Character through English Language Learning

The findings also revealed that the process of constructing students' religious character occurred through habituation, teacher role modeling, and interactions throughout the learning process. The teacher served as a role model by demonstrating religious attitudes in speaking, behaving, and interacting with students. The habituation of polite language use, mutual respect, discipline in following classroom rules, and appreciation of positive behavior became integral components of the process of developing students' religious character (Ansor et al., 2025).

Observational findings indicated that the construction of students' religious character developed gradually through various learning activities involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Students gained an understanding of religious values not only through the teacher's explanations but also through direct experiences encountered during the learning process. Learning activities emphasizing cooperation, responsibility, and mutual respect provided opportunities for students to practice these values in authentic situations.

Based on the interview results, most students reported that they had become accustomed to using polite expressions in both English and Indonesian when interacting with teachers and peers. This habit was developed because the teacher consistently modeled appropriate behavior and reminded students of the importance of maintaining ethical communication. Students also demonstrated an awareness that politeness constitutes an essential religious value that should be practiced in everyday life, a finding that is consistent with previous research highlighting that teacher modeling and linguistic politeness contribute significantly to students' character formation and ethical communication practices (Ramadhan, 2025).

The findings further revealed that group learning activities contributed significantly to the development of students' religious character. Through these activities, students learned to help one another, respect others' opinions, and complete tasks collaboratively. The cooperative attitudes demonstrated during the learning process reflected the values of brotherhood, social concern, and tolerance, which are fundamental elements of religious character. Through such interactions, students learned that success is determined not only by individual abilities but also by the capacity to collaborate effectively with others (Sumar et al., 2025).

In addition, the teacher actively reinforced positive behaviors demonstrated by students throughout the learning process. Such reinforcement took the form of praise, appreciation, and motivation whenever students displayed honesty, discipline, and responsibility. Consistent reinforcement encouraged students to maintain these positive behaviors, which gradually became embedded as part of their personal character.

The research data also indicated behavioral changes perceived by both teachers and students following the implementation of learning activities integrated with religious values. Several students became more disciplined in completing assignments, more confident in expressing their opinions, and more respectful toward teachers and peers during classroom activities. These changes suggest that English language learning contributed not only to the improvement of language proficiency but also to the development of attitudes and behaviors that reflect religious character (Fitriah et al., 2025).

Overall, the construction of students' religious character at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, occurred through a continuous process involving various elements of learning. Teacher role modeling, the habituation of positive behaviors, supportive social interactions, and the integration of religious values into learning materials emerged as the primary factors supporting the development of students' religious character. These findings indicate that English language learning can serve as an effective medium for fostering religious character when it is designed and implemented in an integrated, consistent, and value-oriented manner.

Discussion

English Language Learning as a Medium for Internalizing Religious Values

The findings of this study indicate that English language learning functions not only as a means of developing language competence but also as a medium for internalizing religious values. The integration of religious values into the learning process provides students with opportunities to understand the relationship between knowledge and life values. This finding is consistent with the perspective of character education, which views learning as a vehicle for shaping students' attitudes and behaviors ([Akbar, 2025](#)).

The integration of religious values through teaching materials, instructional methods, and classroom interactions enables students to gain more meaningful learning experiences. Values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and gratitude are not taught merely as theoretical concepts but are embedded in various learning activities that students can understand and practice. Therefore, English language learning contributes to establishing a balance between academic achievement and the development of religious character ([Fardita et al., 2022](#)).

The findings further demonstrate that the process of internalizing religious values becomes more effective when such values are integrated into contextual learning activities. Students do not perceive themselves as receiving formal religious instruction or moral lectures; instead, they acquire an understanding of values through enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. This condition suggests that English language learning can serve as a form of character education that is more adaptive to the needs and developmental stages of elementary school students ([Ciptaningrum et al., 2025](#)).

From the perspective of character education, the process of value internalization involves three stages: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The findings reveal that these three stages were evident in English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang. Students not only learned about the concepts of honesty, discipline, and responsibility through instructional materials but also demonstrated awareness and willingness to apply these values in both classroom activities and everyday life ([Lickona, 2022](#)).

The integration of religious values into English language learning also highlights the close relationship between language acquisition and identity formation. Language is not merely a communication tool but also a medium through which values, culture, and beliefs are conveyed. Therefore, the use of learning materials containing moral and religious messages can help students develop language proficiency while preserving their cultural and spiritual identities ([Miranda, 2025](#)).

The findings support the view that twenty-first-century learning should not focus solely on academic skills. Students need to be equipped with character values that serve as a foundation for addressing various social, cultural, and technological challenges. Through the integration of religious values into English language learning, students are provided with opportunities to develop critical thinking, communication skills, and responsible behavior in accordance with religious and societal norms ([Rehman et al., 2024](#)).

Another important aspect identified in this study is the role of the classroom environment as a space for character development. Interactions between teachers and students during the learning process create an atmosphere that supports the growth of religious values. When teachers encourage mutual respect, appreciate positive behavior, and maintain courteous communication, students receive concrete examples of how religious values can be practiced in social life ([Ansor et al., 2025](#)).

The findings also reveal that the internalization of religious values through English language learning positively influences students' learning motivation. Students tend to be more enthusiastic about participating in lessons because the materials presented are closely related to their daily lives. Their emotional engagement in the learning process enables them to understand the materials more deeply while simultaneously internalizing the moral messages embedded within them. Consequently, learning not only enhances language competence but also provides a more meaningful educational experience ([Fardita et al., 2022](#)).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that English language learning possesses considerable potential as a medium for internalizing religious values in elementary schools. The success of this process largely depends on teachers' ability to design learning activities that are integrative, contextual, and character-oriented. Therefore, strengthening teachers' competencies in integrating religious values into English language instruction should continue to be prioritized in order to achieve educational goals that balance academic excellence and character development.

The Role of Teachers in the Construction of Students' Religious Character

The construction of students' religious character identified in this study cannot be separated from the role of teachers as facilitators, motivators, and role models. Teachers are not only responsible for delivering learning materials but also for creating a learning environment that supports the development of religious values. The role modeling demonstrated by teachers through their attitudes, behaviors, and communication during the learning process serves as a crucial factor in shaping students' character ([Ansor et al., 2025](#)).

These findings support the theory of social constructivism, which argues that character formation occurs through social interactions and learning experiences encountered by individuals. In the context of English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang, students developed their understanding of religious values through continuous processes of observation, imitation, and habituation. Therefore, the success of religious character construction is determined not only by the content being taught but also by the quality of interactions established between teachers and students throughout the learning process ([Creswell & Poth, 2024](#)).

The teacher's role as a role model emerged as one of the most influential factors in the construction of students' religious character. At the elementary school level, students tend to imitate the behaviors and habits of individuals they consider important in their lives, including their teachers. Consequently, teachers' demonstration of honesty, discipline, responsibility, patience, and politeness in communication exerts a strong influence on students' character development. Such role modeling represents a more effective form of character education than merely conveying values through verbal instruction ([Nursobah, 2025](#)).

In addition to serving as role models, teachers also function as facilitators who provide learning experiences that enable students to actively develop religious values. The findings indicate that teachers not only taught English language materials but also designed learning activities that encouraged students to collaborate, respect differing opinions, and take responsibility for assigned tasks. These activities provided opportunities for students to practice religious values in authentic situations, allowing the character formation process to occur naturally and continuously ([Fardita et al., 2022](#)).

The findings further reveal that the success of religious character construction is strongly influenced by teachers' ability to establish positive communication with students. Communication characterized by appreciation, empathy, and care fosters harmonious relationships between teachers and students. Such positive relationships make students more receptive to guidance, advice, and values conveyed by teachers. Consequently, educational communication becomes an essential instrument in the process of internalizing religious values within the school environment ([Ramadhan, 2025](#)).

Moreover, teachers play a significant role as motivators who consistently encourage students to maintain positive behaviors. The motivation provided extends beyond recognition of academic achievement

to include appreciation of attitudes and behaviors that reflect religious character. Continuous positive reinforcement helps students understand that good conduct constitutes an important component of both academic success and social life. This condition encourages the development of internal awareness, motivating students to practice religious values independently without constant supervision from teachers ([Ansor et al., 2025](#)).

The findings of this study confirm that the construction of students' religious character is a complex process requiring the active involvement of teachers in various aspects of learning. Teachers function not only as knowledge transmitters but also as agents of change who contribute significantly to shaping students' personalities. Therefore, strengthening teachers' pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies is essential for supporting the success of religious character education in elementary schools, particularly in English language learning integrated with moral and religious values ([Nursobah, 2025](#)).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English language learning integrated with religious values can serve as an effective medium for fostering students' religious character. These findings reinforce the importance of developing integrative learning models that focus not only on language competence achievement but also on character development, which remains one of the primary objectives of national education.

IMPLICATIONS RESEARCH

The findings of this study imply that English language learning can serve not only as a means of developing students' language competence but also as an effective medium for strengthening religious character through the integration of values into teaching materials, learning activities, and classroom interactions. This study contributes theoretically by enriching the discourse on the integration of character education and English language learning, while practically encouraging teachers to adopt value-based instructional strategies that promote both linguistic competence and moral development. In addition, the findings provide useful insights for school leaders and educational policymakers in designing curricula and learning policies that balance twenty-first-century skills with religious and character education. Future research is recommended to involve broader educational contexts, larger samples, and quantitative or mixed-method approaches to further examine the effectiveness and long-term impact of integrating religious values into English language learning.

LIMITATIONS RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was conducted as a single case study at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study involved a limited number of participants consisting of the school principal, the English teacher, and selected students, so the findings primarily reflect the experiences and perspectives within the investigated setting. Third, the study relied on qualitative data obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation without incorporating quantitative measures to examine the magnitude of the relationship between English language learning and students' religious character development. Therefore, future studies are recommended to include broader research settings, larger and more diverse samples, and quantitative or mixed-method approaches to provide more comprehensive and generalizable evidence regarding the effectiveness of integrating religious values into English language learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this study, English teachers are encouraged to systematically integrate religious values into English language learning through teaching materials, classroom interactions, collaborative activities, and reflective learning experiences. Such integration should be designed to promote

not only students' language proficiency but also the development of honesty, responsibility, discipline, respect, and other religious character values. School leaders are also expected to provide institutional support by facilitating teacher professional development, encouraging the use of value-based instructional strategies, and creating a school culture that reinforces character education across learning activities.

Future research is recommended to extend this study by involving a larger number of participants from different schools and educational levels to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Researchers may also employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to examine the effectiveness of integrating religious values into English language learning and its influence on students' language achievement, character development, learning motivation, and other twenty-first-century competencies. Such studies are expected to provide broader empirical evidence for the development of character-based English language learning in elementary education and other educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English language learning at SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, functions not only as a medium for developing students' language competence but also as an effective means of constructing their religious character through the integration of religious values into teaching materials, classroom activities, teacher–student interactions, and the habituation of positive behaviors. The findings demonstrate that religious character was developed through contextual learning experiences, teacher role modeling, collaborative learning, and continuous reinforcement of values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, respect, gratitude, and social care. These findings indicate that integrating religious values into English language learning creates meaningful learning experiences that simultaneously enhance students' linguistic competence and character development.

The findings have important theoretical and practical implications by demonstrating that English language learning can serve as a strategic medium for integrating character education within elementary education. The study provides insights for teachers, school leaders, and educational policymakers to strengthen value-based instructional practices that balance academic achievement with students' moral and spiritual development. However, this study is limited to a single case study conducted at one elementary school with a limited number of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve broader educational settings, larger and more diverse samples, and quantitative or mixed-method approaches to further examine the effectiveness and long-term impact of integrating religious values into English language learning across different educational contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Principal of SD Negeri Lombasang, Gowa Regency, the English teacher, all students, and everyone who provided support, assistance, and cooperation throughout the research process. Appreciation is also extended to lecturers, colleagues, and institutional representatives who contributed valuable suggestions, guidance, and academic support that enabled this study to be successfully completed. It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to the development of English language learning and the strengthening of students' religious character within elementary education settings.

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