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THE INFLUENCE OF FRIENDSHIP AND RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT ON ISLAMIC CHARACTER AMONG STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACTS

Background: Morality and character education remain critical concerns in Malaysia, with growing evidence of moral degradation among youth. Prior studies report inconsistent findings on the role of friendship, while research on religious commitment remains limited in the Malaysian context. **Purpose of the Study:** This study investigates the influence of friendship quality and religious commitment on students' Islamic character. **Methods:** Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 380 respondents and analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. **Findings:** The results indicate that friendship has a positive but modest effect on students' Islamic character (effect size = 0.022), whereas religious commitment shows a substantially stronger influence (effect size = 0.208). Together, both variables explain 33% of the variance in Islamic character ($R^2 = 0.330$). These results highlight that while peer interactions contribute to character development, internal religious commitment plays a primary role. **Conclusions:** These findings highlight the importance of institutional support for religious engagement in higher education, even in non-religious universities like Universiti Utara Malaysia. Measures such as creating supportive environments for religious practice, promoting ethical reflection, and setting clear boundaries for social interactions can help maintain and strengthen students' Islamic values while guiding peer relationships and preventing negative external influences. Future research is recommended to explore the remaining 67% of unexplained variance as potential factors.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Morality refers to the principles that distinguish right from wrong intentions, decisions, and actions, and functions as a foundation for social harmony and responsible behaviour (Bhakta, 2017; Jain & Patodia, 2022). In Islamic thought, morality is conceptualised as *akhlaq*, which, according to Al-Ghazali, represents an internalised disposition that guides behaviour spontaneously and consistently through habituation (Hotimah & Hasyim, 2024). This conception integrates inner moral orientation with outward conduct, positioning character as a reflection of both spiritual commitment and social practice (Ashfaq, 2022).

Character development remains a central concern within contemporary education, particularly in societies where moral values are embedded in national policy. In Malaysia, character education has been institutionalised through the integration of moral and *akhlaq* instruction across curricular and co-curricular activities (Mahanani et al., 2022), supported by substantial public investment in education (Yusof et al., 2024). However, empirical evidence suggests that moral challenges among young people persist, indicating that institutional efforts alone may be insufficient to ensure sustained character formation (Ismail et al., 2022). The official document of the Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia states that the number of sexual offences involving children reported to the Royal Malaysia Police rose by 26.5% in 2023, reaching 1,567 cases compared to 1,239 cases in 2022. Cases of physical sexual assault against children saw a notable increase of 21.1%, with 1,389 cases reported in 2023 compared to 1,147 in the previous year. Additionally, non-physical sexual assault cases and child pornography offences were reported at 91 and 67 cases, respectively, in 2023 (Media Statement, 2024).

Previous studies increasingly attribute character vulnerability to social environmental factors, especially peer relationships (Hartanti, 2023). Friendship constitutes a primary context of socialisation during adolescence and early adulthood, shaping values and behaviour through processes of imitation, reinforcement, and mutual influence (Arifin et al., 2018; Iervolino et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2020). This is aligned with the study by Aulia et al., (2024), Mahmud, (2022) and Naimah, (2022) revealed that friendships significantly influence the formation of student character because, in the process of socialisation. Compared to parental relationships, friendships are characterised by relative equality and emotional openness, allowing peers to exert a distinct influence on identity formation (Harris, 1995; Tumangday, 1977). This mechanism aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasises behavioural internalisation through observation and social interaction (Marks, 2002). Within Islamic scholarship, in *Bidayatul Hidayah*, Al-Ghazali emphasises the moral significance of companionship through the well-known maxim *al-mar'u 'alā dīni khalīlihi*, which suggests that an individual's moral and religious orientation is strongly shaped by that of their close companions (Al-Ghazali, 2007). In this formulation, *dīn* denotes one's religious and ethical commitment, while *khalīl* refers to intimate friendship, indicating that peer relationships function as a critical medium for moral transmission. Further elaboration found in *Maraqil 'Ubudiyah* reinforces this interpretation, highlighting that sustained interaction within friendship networks contributes to the internalisation and habituation of moral character (An-Nawawi, 2010).

Despite this theoretical support, empirical findings on the influence of friendship on character remain inconclusive. Some studies report significant associations between

peer relationships and character development, while others find weak or limited effects compared to familial influences (Hock et al., 2021; Shan & Zöllitz, 2022; Swid, 2022). These inconsistencies indicate the need to re-examine friendship not merely as a social variable, but in relation to internal moral factors that may condition its influence.

On the other hand, religious commitment also represents a key internal dimension in character formation. This premise is grounded in Qur'anic teachings, which emphasise that sustained religious practice fosters moral restraint and prevents reprehensible behaviour, as articulated in the verse "*innaṣ-ṣhalāta tanhā 'an al-faḥshā' wa al-munkar.*" (Shihab, 2005). Consistent with this ethical foundation, empirical research across psychological and educational contexts demonstrates that religious commitment shapes moral judgement, self-regulation, and behavioural consistency (Rashad, 2013; Ratnasari, 2023; Yildiz Cakir et al., 2024). Within Al-Ghazali's framework, religious commitment (*dīn*) precedes social influence, functioning as a moral anchor that shapes how individuals engage with their social environment. However, despite Malaysia's strong religious landscape, empirical studies examining the relationship between religious commitment and character remain scarce (Mohamed, 2018).

Drawing on Al-Ghazali's conception of Islamic character, which emphasises the integration of inner religious commitment and outward social conduct, this study positions religious commitment and friendship quality as two interrelated determinants of students' Islamic character. Al-Ghazali's framework underscores that moral character is not shaped solely by personal piety but also through continuous social interaction and habituation within one's environment (Afifah, 2018). In the context of university life, where peer relationships constitute a primary social sphere, friendship quality represents a critical external influence, while religious commitment reflects an internal moral orientation (Ashfaq, 2022). Therefore, guided by this theoretical perspective, the present study aims to empirically examine the effects of friendship quality and religious commitment on students' Islamic character.

The selection of students at Universiti Utara Malaysia as the focus of this study is particularly significant given the unique institutional and socio-cultural context of higher education. The university examined in this study is recognised as a leading management-based institution and serves a highly diverse student population (Ultimate Education, 2025). With a total enrolment of 30,149 students in 2024, the university accommodates individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, including Malay, Chinese, and Indian students, as well as international students from different countries (UUM Officials, 2024). This diversity inevitably brings together a wide range of lifestyles, value systems, and social norms, creating a dynamic environment where value exchange and social assimilation are likely to occur through daily interactions and friendship networks.

In such a multicultural academic setting, peer relationships play a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes, behaviours, and moral orientations. For Muslim students in particular, exposure to diverse friendship circles may present both opportunities for positive social development and challenges to the maintenance of Islamic character (Muslim et al., 2022). This condition raises an important empirical question regarding whether Muslim students can preserve their Islamic character amidst intensive social interactions with peers from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, or whether such exposure may lead to value dilution or behavioural compromise (Mat et al., 2021).

Consequently, systematic examination of the roles of friendship quality and religious commitment becomes essential to understand character formation in this context.

This issue is further underscored by Malaysia's national context as a country with the second-largest Muslim population in ASEAN after Indonesia, where approximately 63.5% of the population adheres to Islam (Dataloka, 2025). In Malaysia, Islamic values and moral conduct are not only personal religious matters but are also closely linked to national educational objectives and public policy (Mahanani et al., 2022). Therefore, investigating the interplay between friendship, religious commitment, and Islamic character among Malaysian university students is not only academically relevant but also socially and institutionally important for monitoring and strengthening character development within higher education. With this approach, the research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education as well as be practical in supporting character education policies in Malaysia.

B. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of friendship and religious commitment on the Islamic character of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) students. The population consisted of 20,721 Muslim students (Hal Ehwal Akademik BPK, 2025). Based on the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sampling table, a sample of 380 respondents was deemed sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal selection probability and enhance the generalisability of the findings (Stockemer, 2019).

The research instrument comprised three validated constructs: friendship, religious commitment, and Islamic character. The friendship construct was adapted from Rezkianti (2019), while religious commitment was measured using an instrument adapted from Mayondhika (2012). Both constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Islamic character was measured using an instrument adapted from Azma (2006), grounded in Al-Ghazali's moral framework, and assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Subject-matter experts reviewed all instruments to ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness. A pilot study was subsequently conducted to assess item clarity, reliability, and construct validity, and only items meeting acceptable criteria were retained (Sugiyono, 2019). Following confirmation of a valid and reliable instrument, full-scale data collection was conducted over two weeks using a structured online questionnaire, resulting in 380 valid responses from 450 distributed questionnaires, which yielded an 84.44% response rate.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. This approach was selected due to its suitability for predictive research, its robustness with complex models, and its ability to handle data without strict normality assumptions. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure, comprising the assessment of the measurement model and the structural model (Hair et al., 2022).

1. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure that all constructs were reliable and valid:

- Indicator Reliability – Examined the outer loadings of each item to confirm that individual indicators adequately represent their respective constructs.
- Internal Consistency Reliability – Assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) to ensure constructs are measured consistently.
- Convergent Validity – Evaluated using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to confirm that constructs explain a substantial portion of their indicators' variance.
- Discriminant Validity – Assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings to ensure constructs are distinct from one another.

2. Structural Model Assessment

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was examined to test the hypothesized relationships:

- Path Coefficients – Estimated to assess the strength and direction of relationships between constructs.
- Effect Size (F^2) – Evaluated to determine the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable.
- Coefficient of Determination (R^2) – Assessed to measure the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables.
- Predictive Relevance (Q^2) – Examined to evaluate the model's predictive accuracy using a blindfolding procedure.

Based on this methodological framework, the following hypotheses are empirically examined:

Table 1. Hypothesis

Code	Hypothesis Statement
H ₁	There is a significant influence of friendship on the Islamic character among Universiti Utara Malaysia's students
H ₂	There is a significant influence of religious commitment on the Islamic character among Universiti Utara Malaysia's students

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Demographic Information

The data obtained from a questionnaire distributed to the Muslim student population at UUM consisted of a total of 380 respondents, classified into two groups based on gender and the program they were enrolled in.

Table 2. Demographic Information

Demographics	Categories	n	Percentage
Gender	Male	135	35%
	Female	245	65%
Program	Undergraduate	216	57%,
	Postgraduate	164	43%
Grand Total	All respondents	380	100%

The demographic data were not used for comparative analysis between groups; rather, they serve to enrich the contextual understanding of the findings.

2. The Measurement Model

Before testing the hypothesised relationships, the measurement model was assessed to confirm the reliability and validity of the research constructs. This evaluation involved examining indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability, and construct validity, encompassing both convergent and discriminant validity. Only after the measurement model met acceptable criteria were the structural relationships interpreted.

Table 3. Reliability and Validity Analyses

Construct and item	Loadings	AVE	Cronbach's α	CR
Friendship		0.568	0.848	0.887
F.1	0.755			
F.4	0.783			
F.5	0.711			
F.6	0.764			
F.9	0.765			
F.10	0.742			
Religious Commitment		0.696	0.956	0.962
RC.1	0.849			
RC.2	0.820			
RC.3	0.815			
RC.5	0.770			
RC.6	0.882			
RC.7	0.851			
RC.8	0.872			
RC.9	0.874			
RC.10	0.864			
RC.11	0.855			
RC.13	0.710			
Islamic Character		0.598	0.944	0.951
IC5	0.780			
IC6	0.787			
IC9	0.723			
IC11	0.804			
IC20	0.726			
IC22	0.795			
IC23	0.803			
IC25	0.784			
IC26	0.778			
IC29	0.768			
IC32	0.813			
IC34	0.770			
IC35	0.714			

After the loading analysis, 6 valid items remained in the friendship variable, 11 valid items in the religious commitment variable, and 13 valid items in the Islamic character variable, with all retained items showing outer loadings above 0.70. The

average variance extracted (AVE) values also exceeded the threshold of 0.50, confirming convergent validity. In terms of reliability, the friendship variable recorded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.848 and a composite reliability of 0.887; the religious commitment variable showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.956 and a Composite reliability of 0.962; and the Islamic character variable achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.944 and a Composite reliability of 0.951. Since all values were greater than 0.70, it can be concluded that the three variables demonstrate strong reliability and validity.

3. Discriminant Validity

This stage represents the final step in the measurement model before proceeding to hypothesis testing.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Result

	Friendship	Islamic Character	Religious Commitment
Friendship	0.754		
Islamic Character	0.436	0.773	
Religious Commitment	0.605	0.561	0.834

The Friendship variable demonstrated a higher correlation with itself (0.754) than with the other variables. Similarly, the Islamic Character variable showed the highest value with itself (0.773), and the Religious Commitment variable recorded the greatest value with itself (0.834). These results indicate that each construct correlates more strongly with itself than with other constructs. Therefore, it can be concluded that all three variables meet the criteria for discriminant validity.

4. The Structural Model

This test was carried out to answer the hypothesis and research questions. After getting the results to answer the hypothesis and research questions, all of these tests will be evaluated through Predictive relevance to ensure that all test stages and results provided are good and accurate. This test consists of Path Coefficient, Effect Size, Coefficient Determination, and Predictive Relevance. Below is a table of categories for the test (Hair et al., 2022 and Chin, 1998).

Table 5. The Value Category

Category	Effect Size	Coefficient Determination	Predictive Relevance
Strong/Large	0.35	0.67	0.35
Moderate/Medium	0.15	0.33	0.15
Weak/Small	0.02	0.19	0.02

5. H₁: There is a significant influence of friendship on the Islamic character among Universiti Utara Malaysia's students

Table 6. Path coefficient of H₁
friendship → Islamic character

O. Sample	f^2	St. Deviation	T-Statistics	P Values
0.152	0.022	0.060	2.524	0.012

The analysis of the first hypothesis demonstrates that friendship significantly influences Islamic character among UUM students. The T-statistic value of 2.524, which exceeds the critical threshold of 1.96, and the P-value of 0.012, which is smaller than 0.05, confirm the statistical significance of this relationship (Hair et al., 2022). These findings support the acceptance of the first hypothesis (H_1), indicating that students who experience positive friendship environments tend to exhibit stronger Islamic character traits. A closer examination of the friendship instrument reveals that the strongest contributing item (outer loadings = 0.783) is F.4: "I choose friends who have a good attitude" (see Table 3), highlighting the role of selective association in character development. This suggests that students' moral agency in choosing peers may be more influential than peer pressure itself. In other words, friendship affects Islamic character not merely through social conformity, but through conscious moral selection, a notion consistent with Al-Ghazali's assertion that individuals are shaped by those they willingly associate with (Al-Ghazali, 2007).

Nevertheless, the effect size of 0.022 indicates that the magnitude of friendship's influence on Islamic character is relatively small (see Table 5). This suggests that while friendship plays a statistically meaningful role, it is not the dominant determinant of Islamic character formation among students. In the context of higher education, students are exposed to multiple normative systems simultaneously, which may dilute the direct behavioural impact of friendship alone (Achdiyadzan et al., 2022). In Al-Ghazali's view, *khalil* (social influences) is not a primary determinant to build character, but it is complementary, working on another disposition. Al-Ghazali said that friendship influence relies on religious aspects as reflected in the maxim *al-mar'u 'alā dīni khalilihi* (An-Nawawi, 2010).

This modest effect may be explained by the complex and multidimensional nature of character development, which is shaped not only by friendship interactions but also by other moral dispositions such as family upbringing, institutional environments, and broader socio-cultural influences (Ratnasari, 2023). Another factor that may help explain the modest effect size of friendship is the heterogeneous social environment at Universiti Utara Malaysia. Students routinely interact with peers from diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, which may dilute the extent to which friendship relationships function as direct channels for the internalisation of specifically Islamic values. Given that Muslim students constitute 20,721 of the 30,149 enrolled students (Hal Ehwal Akademik BPK, 2025), friendship networks at UUM are not exclusively shaped by the same religious norms, thereby limiting the strength of friendship as a singular predictor of Islamic character.

The relatively small effect size observed in this study also aligns with prior empirical findings. Hock et al. (2021), for example, reported that peer influence accounted for only 23.2% of behavioural variation in smoking initiation, while Swid (2022) found that friendship contributed merely 12.8% to student character development. These convergent findings suggest that peer influence, although significant, tends to operate alongside stronger internal and familial factors rather than functioning as an independent determinant.

6. H₂: There is a significant influence of religious commitment on the Islamic character among Universiti Utara Malaysia's students

Table 7. Path Coefficient of H₂

religious commitment → Islamic character				
O. Sample	f^2	St. Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
0.470	0.208	0.102	4.587	0.000

The results of the second hypothesis test (H₂) indicate that religious commitment has a positive and statistically significant influence on Islamic character among UUM students. This is evidenced by a T-statistic of 4.587, exceeding the critical value of 1.96, and a P-value of 0.000, which is well below the 0.05 significance threshold (Hair et al., 2022). Accordingly, H₂ is accepted. The effect size of 0.208 falls within the medium category (see Table 5), suggesting that religious commitment constitutes a substantive and meaningful predictor of Islamic character development.

At the indicator level, RC.6 “I pray five times a day” emerged as the strongest contributor, with an outer loading of 0.882 (see Table 3). This finding underscores the central role of prayer as a lived religious practice through which religious commitment is translated into moral conduct. Within the Islamic tradition, prayer is not merely a ritual obligation but a formative process that sustains an individual’s moral consciousness and accountability. The Qur’anic assertion that “indeed, prayer restrains from indecency and wrongdoing.” (Shihab, 2005). provides a theological foundation for understanding how consistent prayer cultivates self-regulation and ethical awareness. In this sense, religious commitment functions as an internal moral compass that guides students’ behaviour in both spiritual and social domains.

These findings align with prior empirical research demonstrating that religious commitment significantly shapes moral judgement, behavioural consistency, and self-regulation (Hardy & King, 2019; Tekke et al., 2020). Beyond confirming existing literature, this study also offers a distinct contribution by situating religious commitment in contrast to other social influences highlighted in prior research. For instance, Hock et al. (2021) emphasised parental influence as a more dominant factor in shaping student behaviour than peer relationships. While the present study does not negate the role of family or friendship, the findings indicate that religious commitment exerts a more decisive and substantial influence on Islamic character compared to friendship.

In the context of Universiti Utara Malaysia’s multicultural and multireligious campus environment, the findings indicate that Islamic character among Muslim students is not weakened by social diversity. Instead, it is sustained through strong religious commitment, suggesting that internalised religious principles serve as a stabilising moral anchor within a heterogeneous social setting.

Rather than merely reinforcing existing literature, the present study extends these insights by situating religious commitment alongside friendship as a comparative predictor of Islamic character. While friendship exerts a statistically significant yet modest influence, religious commitment emerges as the more substantial determinant. This asymmetry in influence is theoretically consistent with Al-Ghazali’s moral framework, in which *dīn* (religious commitment) constitutes the primary foundation of character, while *khalil* (friendship or social influence) operates as a complementary

factor. Al-Ghazali's maxim *al-mar'u 'alā dīni khalīlihi* explicitly situates social influence as contingent upon one's religious orientation, suggesting that companionship derives its moral effect from the individual's underlying religious disposition (Afifah, 2018; Tekke et al., 2020).

7. Coefficient Determination and Predictive Relevance

The testing of structural models (inner models) aims to analyse the relationships between constructs or latent variables to ensure that the model used has a good level of accuracy. This evaluation was carried out by looking at the R^2 value, which serves as an indicator of the goodness-of-fit model. Then, the predictive relevance (Q^2) of a model test evaluates the model's ability to predict omitted data, thereby determining its overall predictive strength. The Q^2 value greater than zero ($Q^2 > 0$) signifies that the model possesses predictive relevance, meaning it effectively captures and forecasts underlying patterns within the dataset (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 8. R Square

Construct	R Square	R Adjusted	Q^2 _predict
Islamic Character	0.330	0.326	0.290

The structural model demonstrates moderate explanatory power, with an R^2 value of 0.330, indicating that friendship and religious commitment jointly explain 33% of the variance in Islamic character (see Table 5). Meanwhile, the remaining 67% is influenced by other variables that were not examined in this study, highlighting the multifaceted nature of Islamic character formation. This result aligns with Al-Ghazali's ethical framework, which posits that social influence (*khalīl*) does not operate independently but is conditioned by religious orientation (*dīn*), as reflected in the maxim "*al-mar'u 'alā dīni khalīlihi*". Friendship, therefore, functions as a complementary factor whose influence is mediated by religious commitment, reinforcing the view that Islamic character emerges from the interaction between internal faith and external social contexts.

The model also exhibits moderate predictive relevance, with a Q^2 value of 0.290, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.15 (see Table 5). This indicates that the model has adequate predictive capability, while the unexplained variance underscores the need for future research to explore additional determinants of Islamic character.

8. Educational and Policy Implications

The findings of this study provide clear implications for educational practices and institutional policies related to character education. The relatively small effect of friendship indicates that character education strategies should not rely solely on peer-based socialisation or informal social environments to shape students' moral development. While friendships contribute positively, their influence appears limited when not supported by stronger internal moral foundations.

In contrast, the moderate effect of religious commitment suggests that strengthening students' internal religious orientation plays a more decisive role in fostering Islamic character. For educational practice, this implies that character education initiatives in universities and schools should place greater emphasis on

nurturing students' religious commitment as a core moral resource. Such efforts may include creating supportive environments for religious practice, encouraging reflective engagement with religious values, and integrating ethical reflection into academic and co-curricular activities, rather than depending exclusively on peer interaction as a mechanism of character formation.

From an institutional policy perspective, these findings are particularly relevant for universities operating within multicultural and non-religious institutional frameworks, such as Universiti Utara Malaysia. Although UUM is recognised as an eminent management-based university rather than an Islamic institution, the results suggest that providing institutional support for religious life on campus remains important. Policies that facilitate religious observance, respect religious obligations, and acknowledge the moral role of religiosity can contribute to sustaining students' Islamic character without altering the university's core academic orientation.

More broadly, this study indicates that effective character education policies should adopt a balanced approach by recognising the complementary roles of internal religious commitment and social interaction. Strengthening religious commitment may serve as a moral anchor that enables students to navigate diverse peer environments while maintaining ethical consistency. These insights can inform the design of character education strategies in higher education and secondary education contexts, particularly in plural societies where students are exposed to multiple value systems

D. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that both friendship and religious commitment significantly contribute to the formation of Islamic character among students at Universiti Utara Malaysia, albeit with differing magnitudes. While friendship exerts a positive influence, its effect is relatively modest, indicating that peer relationships alone are insufficient as the primary driver of Islamic character development. In contrast, religious commitment emerges as a more substantial and decisive factor, underscoring the central role of internalised religious values in shaping students' moral orientation and daily conduct.

These findings carry important implications for character education in higher education, particularly within multicultural and non-religious universities such as Universiti Utara Malaysia. Although UUM is primarily recognised as an eminent management university rather than an Islamic institution, the results suggest that providing institutional support for religious engagement remains relevant and appropriate. Such supports may include creating supportive environments for religious practice, encouraging reflective engagement with religious values, and integrating ethical reflection into academic and co-curricular activities. Additionally, establishing clear boundaries for social interaction can help ensure that students' religious and moral commitments are maintained while participating in diverse peer environments. By guiding interactions and supporting faith-based practices, universities can create conditions that strengthen Islamic values and prevent negative external influences from undermining moral development.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. Given that approximately 67% of the variance in Islamic character remains unexplained, future research could explore additional predictors and employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to gain a deeper understanding of the factors shaping students' Islamic character.

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