

Date Received : November 2025
Date Revised : February 2026
Date Accepted : February 2026
Date Published : February 2026

TOWARD AN ADAB-BASED CONCEPTUAL CHARACTER EDUCATION MODEL: INTEGRATING LICKONA AND AL-ATTAS IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING FOR ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Parina¹

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia (parina@upi.edu)

Syihabuddin

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

Momod Abdul Somad

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

Aceng Kosasih

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

Kata Kunci:

pendidikan karakter Islam, adab, Thomas Lickona, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Project-Based Learning*

ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Pendidikan karakter di sekolah Islam menghadapi tantangan untuk menggabungkan nilai-nilai moral universal dengan prinsip spiritual yang bersumber dari ajaran Islam. Namun, berbagai model pendidikan karakter yang berkembang selama ini cenderung memisahkan kerangka moral Barat dari landasan epistemologis Islam, khususnya konsep adab sebagai inti pembentukan manusia berilmu dan berakhlak. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan mengembangkan model konseptual pendidikan karakter berbasis integrasi antara kerangka pendidikan karakter Thomas Lickona dan konsep adab Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas dalam konteks *Project-Based Learning* (PBL) di Sekolah Dasar Islam. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan *library research* dengan analisis tematik dan sintesis konseptual terhadap literatur primer dan sekunder yang relevan. **Hasil:** Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tiga dimensi pendidikan karakter menurut Lickona—*moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, dan *moral action*—dapat dipadukan dengan prinsip ilmu, adab, dan amal dalam pemikiran Al-Attas untuk membentuk model pendidikan karakter Islam yang menyeluruh. Integrasi ini memperkuat landasan spiritual dan epistemologis pendidikan karakter sekaligus memberikan struktur pedagogis yang sistematis melalui PBL, yang menekankan pembelajaran reflektif, kolaboratif, dan kontekstual. **Implikasi:** Penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka konseptual baru yang menempatkan adab sebagai fondasi ontologis pendidikan karakter dalam pedagogi berbasis proyek. Model ini juga memberikan implikasi praktis bagi perancangan kurikulum dan desain pembelajaran pendidikan karakter di Sekolah Dasar Islam.

¹ Correspondence Author

Keywords:

Islamic character education, adab, Thomas Lickona, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Project-Based Learning

ABSTRACT

Background: Character education in Islamic schools faces the challenge of integrating universal moral values with spiritual principles derived from Islamic teachings. However, many existing character education models tend to separate Western moral frameworks from Islamic epistemological foundations, particularly the concept of adab as the core of holistic human formation. **Purpose:** This study aims to develop a conceptual character education model through the integration of Thomas Lickona's character education framework and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's concept of adab within the context of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic elementary schools. **Method:** The research employs a library research approach using thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis of relevant primary and secondary literature. **Result:** The findings indicate that Lickona's three dimensions of character education—moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—can be harmonized with the principles of knowledge ('ilm), adab, and righteous action ('amal) in Al-Attas's thought to construct a comprehensive Islamic character education model. This integration strengthens the spiritual and epistemological foundations of character education while providing a systematic pedagogical structure through PBL, which emphasizes reflective, collaborative, and contextual learning. **Implication:** This study offers a novel conceptual framework that positions adabas the ontological foundation of character education within project-based pedagogy. The proposed model also provides practical implications for curriculum design and instructional planning in Islamic elementary education.

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in the 21st century faces increasingly complex challenges due to rapid global social, cultural, and technological change. Education is no longer required only to produce intellectually capable students, but also individuals with strong character and noble conduct. In this context, character education becomes both a national educational goal and a spiritual priority for Muslims. However, in practice, character education often remains declarative and is not fully internalized in daily learning activities, including in Islamic elementary schools. This condition highlights the urgent need for an educational model that integratively unites values, knowledge, and righteous action in accordance with Islamic educational principles.

Recent studies further reinforce this urgency by indicating a moral and spiritual crisis among younger generations driven by value globalization and digital disruption (Agbaria, 2024). Religious education, which should lead to moral development, frequently stops at cognitive instruction and normative memorization without touching reflective and applicative dimensions (Abdalla, 2025). From an Islamic perspective, education is not merely knowledge transfer but the formation of a civilized personality (*insan adabi*) capable of placing knowledge and action appropriately (Al-Attas, 1991; Yusof & Idris, 2023). Therefore, this research seeks to formulate an integration between Thomas Lickona's character education theory and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's concept of *adab* within the increasingly adopted Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach in elementary education.

Over the last five years, numerous studies have emphasized integrating character education with Islamic values in learning design. Dabdoub (2024) stresses linking moral values with students' social and spiritual practices, while Al-Mahmudi & Zabidi (2023) show that Islamic value integration increases moral relevance for Muslim learners. Methodologically, PBL is widely used due to its ability to foster responsibility, collaboration, and moral reflection through project activities (Fadhilah & Rahmawati, 2023; Hanifah & Azizah, 2024). These findings open significant opportunities to unite universal character principles with Islamic values through project-based pedagogy.

Nevertheless, research indicates that PBL implementation in Islamic education still faces obstacles. Teachers often emphasize final products and cognitive achievement, while moral and spiritual aspects receive limited attention (Mulyani & Prasetyo, 2022). Character integration also tends to be partial and dependent on individual initiative (Darmawan & Amini, 2023). This gap contrasts with Islamic educational ideals that prioritize moral formation. Western character education, particularly Lickona's three-pillar model—moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—aligns conceptually with Islamic principles of knowledge, faith, and righteous deeds, yet remains insufficiently adapted within Islamic contexts (Lickona, 1991; Lickona & Davidson, 2023).

A conceptual divide also persists between Western humanistic character education and Islamic education oriented toward *adab* and monotheism. Modern character education emphasizes universal social virtues such as empathy and responsibility (Althof & Berkowitz, 2022), whereas Al-Attas (1991) asserts that Islamic education must guide recognition of the true order of existence and humanity's relationship with knowledge and God. The loss of *adab*, he argues, is the root of contemporary moral and intellectual crises—a view reinforced by Yusof & Idris (2023), who identify *Adab* revitalization as essential for Islamic educational reform.

Recent studies also show that the spiritual dimension remains weakly integrated in project-based practices. Alshaymi (2025) highlights ritual worship as a medium for spiritual discipline and character formation, while Mahmud & Yusuf (2023) propose integrating modern moral pedagogy with adab principles for a holistic Islamic learning model. However, systematic research combining Al-Attas's adab with Lickona's character framework within PBL—especially in Indonesian Islamic elementary schools—remains limited. This gap constitutes the primary focus of the present study.

Internationally, PBL research has expanded rapidly. Systematic reviews demonstrate its effectiveness in enhancing critical thinking, collaboration, and responsibility (Lee et al., 2025; Sánchez-García et al., 2025). Yet in Islamic schools, PBL is often implemented technically without a consistent moral-spiritual orientation (Rahman & Husna, 2024), indicating the need for reinterpretation aligned with Islamic ethical foundations.

The connection between character and Islamic education is also reflected in the concept of *tarbiyah*, which emphasizes comprehensive cognitive, affective, and spiritual development (Abdalla, 2025). Within this framework, Al-Attas's adab provides the ontological and axiological base, while Lickona's model offers an adaptable methodological structure. Their integration promises a paradigm that forms students who are not only intelligent and moral but also spiritually responsible.

At the practical level, teachers are key to implementing this value integration. Fadhilah & Rahmawati (2023) found that teachers' roles in implementing PBL in Islamic schools tended to focus on project completion, rather than on reflecting on the values contained within them. Similarly, research by Hanifah and Azizah (2024) at SDIT Indonesia showed that implementing Islamic values through PBL effectively increased student engagement, but still required strengthening the dimensions of adab and moral reflection. Thus, a learning model is needed that positions teachers not merely as project facilitators but also as *muaddib* (guides to students' adab and morality).

Indonesia's context, as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, heightens the relevance of this research. Islamic Religious Education at the elementary level still tends to be normative and insufficiently develops self-regulated moral behaviour (Hidayat & Lestari, 2022). Integrating Lickona's and Al-Attas's concepts through PBL is therefore expected to produce a reflective, applicable, and ethically grounded character education model.

Unlike prior studies that treated Western character education and Islamic adab separately, this research proposes an integrative conceptual framework positioning adab as the ontological foundation of project-based character pedagogy. This approach systematically unites intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions within Islamic primary education.

Based on this background, this study addresses the question: How can Lickona's character education concept be conceptually integrated with Al-Attas's concept of adab within a Project-Based Learning framework for Islamic elementary schools? Accordingly, the study aims to formulate a conceptual integration model that contributes theoretically to a holistic Islamic educational paradigm and practically guides teachers in designing project-based learning that cultivates morality, spirituality, and social responsibility in a unified manner.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a library research approach. This approach was chosen because the primary objective of the study was not to test empirical hypotheses, but rather to conduct a conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis of two major frameworks in character education: Thomas Lickona's concept of character education and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's concept of adab. This design enabled the researcher to examine the ideas, values, and principles contained in scientific sources in depth and integrate them within the context of project-based learning (PBL) in Islamic elementary schools.

This library research approach is considered relevant to the nature of Islamic education research, which is oriented toward philosophical and normative exploration. According to Braun & Clark(2021), library research provides space for thematic and interpretive analysis of textual data to generate new understanding or theoretical synthesis. In this context, the researchers reviewed primary literature related to character education, Islamic educational philosophy, and the application of PBL in 21st-century learning. Therefore, this study aims not to measure variables but rather to discover conceptual relationships between universal moral values and Islamic ethical values as a basis for developing an Islamic character education model.

From an epistemological perspective, conceptual research in Islamic education is grounded in the intellectual tradition of integrative reasoning (*ijtihad fikri*), where classical and contemporary knowledge are dialogically examined to construct holistic educational paradigms. Therefore, theoretical synthesis is not merely a methodological choice, but also reflects the Islamic scholarly heritage that values reflection, interpretation, and knowledge integration

This research did not involve direct human participants due to its conceptual nature. Data sources were obtained from primary and secondary literature relevant to the research theme. Primary literature includes monumental works such as Lickona's *Educating for Character* (1991) and Al-Attas's *The Concept of Education in Islam* (1991), which serve as the main conceptual basis for the research. Meanwhile, secondary sources are derived from reputable scientific journal articles published between 2021 and 2025, in both indexed international and national journals.

Literature selection was conducted using purposive sampling, based on relevance to the research focus, academic validity (as indicated by peer-reviewed status), and topicality. Thirty selected sources met these criteria and were used as the basis for the conceptual analysis. Because the research did not involve human subjects, ethical clearance was not required. However, principles of scientific ethics were maintained through accurate citations, avoidance of plagiarism, and respect for the authors' intellectual property rights.

Literature selection was carried out through purposive sampling techniques based on suitability with the research focus, academic validity characterized by peer-reviewed status, and topical novelty. A total of thirty selected sources met these criteria and were used as the basis for conceptual analysis. The literature selection criteria in this study include publications in the range of 1991–2025 to ensure the continuity of classical and contemporary perspectives, peer-reviewed journal articles or books from reputable academic publishers, direct relevance to the theme of character education, the concept of adab, or Project-Based Learning, and the use of English and Indonesian sources. Since this study did not involve human subjects, formal ethical approval was

not required. Nevertheless, the principles of scientific ethics are maintained through the accuracy of citations, the avoidance of plagiarism, and respect for the intellectual property rights of the authors.

The main instrument in this research was a literature review sheet, which was designed to track and record the main ideas from each reference. The data collection procedure was carried out in four systematic stages:

1. Literature Identification and Search

The researcher used a combination of keywords such as "Islamic education," "character education," "adab," "Thomas Lickona," and "Project-Based Learning" in scientific databases such as Scopus, Taylor & Francis, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. The search results were then selected based on topic relevance and publication quality.

2. Data Selection and Classification

Each relevant reference was classified according to its focus: (1) character education theory, (2) the concept of adab in Islamic education, and (3) project-based learning models. This process helped establish an initial thematic framework for the conceptual analysis.

3. Conceptual Recording and Coding

The researcher recorded important information from each source using an analytical table format that included the author's name, year, conceptual focus, methods, and key findings. Recording was done using Mendeley reference management software to maintain citation accuracy and bibliographic consistency.

4. Data Validity and Reliability

Data validity is maintained through source triangulation, which involves comparing ideas from different authors to identify consistency or differences in argumentation. Conceptual reliability is achieved through cross-checking and re-reading definitions, principles, and frameworks from different sources (Althof & Berkowitz, 2022; Darmawan & Amini, 2023; Yusof & Idris, 2023).

Although this research does not use statistical instruments, theoretical validity is ensured by referring to widely recognized theories and authoritative academic sources. Thus, the data collection process is systematic, focused, and transparent.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis as developed by Braun & Clarke (2021). This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth organization and interpretation of textual data to identify patterns of meaning relevant to the research objectives. The analysis process involved several stages:

1. Data Familiarization – The researcher read the entire literature to understand the theoretical context and highlight sections relevant to the issues of character education and adab.
2. Initial Coding – Key ideas such as moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action, and the concepts of adab and muaddib were coded to facilitate theme grouping.
3. Identification of Main Themes – Similar codes were then combined into broad themes, such as "moral character formation," "hierarchy of knowledge and adab," and "teacher as spiritual guide."
4. Theme Review and Refinement – Themes were re-examined against the overall data to ensure integration between Lickona's theory, Al-Attas's concepts, and the PjBL approach.

5. Development of a Synthesis Narrative – The researcher developed a conceptual integration between moral character

The conceptual synthesis in this study was conducted through an integrative conceptual mapping approach, where key constructs from Lickona’s moral framework and Al-Attas’ epistemological perspective were comparatively analyzed, aligned thematically, and reconstructed into a unified pedagogical model

The following table illustrates the theme categorization process in this study:

Table 1. the theme categorization

Analysis Categories	Primary Sources	Emerging Themes
Moral Character Formation	Lickona (1991); Lickona & Davidson (2023)	Moral integration of knowing, feeling, and action
Adab and Islamic Epistemology	Al-Attas (1991); Yusof & Idris (2023)	Hierarchy of knowledge, charity, and recognition of truth
Project-Based Learning Approach	Lee et al. (2025); Hanifah & Azizah (2024)	Values-based reflective and collaborative learning
The Role of Teachers in Character Formation	Mahmud & Yusuf (2023); Fadhilah & Rahmawati (2023)	Teachers as muaddib and facilitators of adab

The final stage of analysis was carried out through conceptual synthesis, namely the unification of thematic results to form a theoretical model explaining the relationship between manners and character in the context of Project-Based Learning. This model demonstrates that project-based learning can function as a vehicle for developing civilized character because it involves direct experience, responsibility, and reflection on spiritual values.

Overall, this study employed a literature-based qualitative method that emphasized thematic and interpretive analysis. This approach yielded in-depth conceptual understanding and offered theoretical contributions to the development of an integrative Islamic character education model—incorporating universal moral values and adab as the core of project-based learning in Islamic elementary schools.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research produced several systematic and comprehensive conceptual findings regarding the integration of Thomas Lickona’s character education theory with the concept of manners in the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, as well as its implications for the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in Islamic Elementary Schools. The findings were obtained through a process of analysis of primary and secondary literature sourced from thirty cutting-edge scientific references, both national and international, that are relevant to character education, Islamic educational philosophy, and the application of PBL in the context of Islamic education.

The results of this study are presented in four major themes that answer the main focus of the research, namely:

1. The essence of character education, according to Lickona;
2. The essence and conceptual structure of adab according to Al-Attas;
3. The intersection and potential for integration between the two, and

- The formulation of a PBL-based character education model in the context of Islamic Elementary Schools.

The Essence of Character Education According to Thomas Lickona

An analysis of Lickona’s (1991) theory of character education shows that character is a combination of three main components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. These three components form an integral whole that aims to produce individuals who understand, internalize, and practice moral values in their daily lives. Lickona views character education not simply as moral teaching, but as a process of habituation that forms good habits of thought, feeling, and action (Lickona & Davidson, 2023). Table 1 below summarizes the components of character education according to Lickona and their pedagogical functions in learning.

Table 2. Components of Character Education According to Lickona and Their Functions in Learning

Character Components	Conceptual Meaning	Implications for Learning
<i>Moral Knowing</i>	Understanding of correct moral values	Values learning, ethical discussions, case studies
<i>Moral Feeling</i>	Emotional awareness and sensitivity to goodness	Value reflection, empathy, and strengthening of conscience
<i>Moral Action</i>	Implementation of moral values in real-life behavior	Habits, role models, and social action

This concept emphasizes that character cannot be built through moral lectures or memorizing norms alone, but rather through students' active involvement in real-world contexts that demand moral responsibility (Althof & Berkowitz, 2022). This approach has proven relevant in various contemporary studies that emphasize the importance of cognitive and affective student engagement in values-based learning (Dabdoub, 2024).

Several recent studies have extended the application of Lickona's theory to the context of Islamic education. For example, Darmawan & Amini (2023) found that character education is effective when moral values are internalized through collaborative and reflective experiences in elementary schools. Research by Fadhilah & Rahmawati (2023) also showed that implementing character-oriented project-based learning can increase students' sense of responsibility and social empathy, two values that align with the moral feeling and moral action components.

Based on this description, Lickona's theory can be understood as a systematic, operational, and adaptive pedagogical framework in the context of Islamic education, especially when integrated with deeper religious and spiritual values. This framework provides a strong methodological foundation for building character education that is not only normative but also applicable and contextual in the lives of learners.

The Essence of the Concept of Adab in the Thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas

A study of Al-Attas’s (1991) seminal work and further interpretation by Yusof & Idris (2023) demonstrates that adab is the philosophical foundation of the entire Islamic

education system. In Al-Attas's view, adab is not merely politeness or social ethics, but rather the recognition and acknowledgement of the true order of nature, namely, awareness of the positions of God, humanity, and knowledge. The loss of adab is seen as the root of the loss of justice and the corruption of knowledge in the modern education system (Al-Attas, 1991).

The concept of adab includes three main dimensions:

1. The epistemological dimension, namely the recognition of true knowledge and its sources, is both revelation and reason.
2. The moral and spiritual dimension, namely, the recognition of divine truth and humanity's moral bond with God.
3. The social dimension, namely the arrangement of human behaviour and interactions in accordance with just and civilized Islamic values.

Contemporary research supports the relevance of this concept in the context of modern education. Agbaria (2024) emphasized the need for Islamic education that goes beyond simply instilling dogma, but also fosters spiritual awareness and reflective morals. A similar sentiment was expressed by Alsuhaymi (2025), who found that ritual worship, such as prayer, serves as a vehicle for character formation and spiritual discipline when integrated with value reflection.

Based on this description, adab can be understood as a multidimensional concept that harmoniously connects knowledge, values, and charity. In the context of Islamic basic education, adab plays a role as a value orientation that guides the entire learning process to form students who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also moral and have spiritual depth. Thus, adab provides an essential ontological and axiological foundation for the development of a complete and sustainable Islamic character education model.

The Meeting Point between Lickona's Character Theory and Al-Attas's Concept of Adab

The results of the comparative analysis show that although they depart from different epistemological backgrounds, Lickona from Western humanistic morals and Al-Attas from Islamic epistemology, both have the same orientation: education as the formation of moral and civilized human beings.

Both also emphasize the importance of a balance between knowledge, feelings, and actions in the educational process. Moral knowing is equivalent to the concept of 'ilm (true knowledge); moral feeling is paralleled by spiritual awareness and a sense of responsibility to God; while moral action aligns with good deeds as the actualization of values in life (Mahmud & Yusuf, 2023). Table 2 below shows a comparison of the value structure and points of contact between the two figures.

Table 2 comparison of the value structure and points of lickona and Al Attas

Aspect	Thomas Lickona	Syed M. N. Al-Attas	Conceptual Meeting Point
Educational Goals	Forming good moral character	Forming civilized individuals.	Education to form moral and civilized individuals.
Sources of Values	Rational and social ethics,	revealed knowledge and reason,	integration of moral and spiritual values.
Learning Process	Reflection and Habituation	Introduction and Practice of Good Manners	Reflective and Transformative Learning
The role of the teacher	Moral role model	Muaddib (adab guide)	Teacher as moral and spiritual guide
Evaluation	Moral attitudes and behavior	Sincerity and depth of character	integrated moral-spiritual assessment

These findings confirm that the integration of Lickona's theory and Al-Attas's concept has the potential to produce a character education model that is not only rational and social, but also spiritual and theological. Lickona's approach provides a strong methodological structure, while Al-Attas's concept of adab enriches the substantial aspects of education with transcendental values.

Thus, the meeting point of these two ideas is not only comparative, but constructive. The integration of the two forms a conceptual foundation that allows the birth of an Islamic character education paradigm that unites cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in one complete and applicable pedagogical framework.

The Relevance of Lickona–Al-Attas Concept Integration in Project-Based Learning

An analysis of the literature on Project-Based Learning shows that this approach is conceptually compatible with the integration of moral and spiritual values (Lee et al., 2025; Petchamé et al., 2024) . Project-Based Learning (PBL) focuses on experiential learning, where students learn through real-life projects that require collaboration, responsibility, and reflection. In the context of Islamic education, this approach can be interpreted as a learning-by-doing process that aligns with the values of good deeds (Hanifah & Azizah, 2024).

Research by Mulyani & Prasetyo (2022) found that the implementation of PjBL in Islamic elementary schools can develop students' spirituality and independent learning, especially when teachers actively guide value reflection. Similarly, Sari & Hadi (2024) demonstrated that PjBL is effective in fostering self-discipline and responsible moral behavior. However, the majority of these studies also demonstrated limitations in the spiritual reflection aspect and the adab dimension, which are not yet methodologically structured.

These findings form the basis for the development of the Lickona–Al-Attas Integration Model in PjBL, which is described in the following table.

Table 3. Lickona–Al-Attas Integrative Model in the Context of PjBL

Learning Stage	Character Dimensions (Lickona)	Adab Dimension (Al-Attas)	Implementation in Islamic Elementary Schools
Stage 1: Project Onboarding	<i>Moral Knowing</i>	<i>Knowledge and sincere intentions</i>	Teachers instill the spiritual purpose of the project and Islamic values
Stage 2: Exploration and Design	<i>Moral Feeling</i>	<i>Manners towards others and the environment</i>	Students collaborate civilly in designing solutions
Stage 3: Project Implementation	<i>Moral Action</i>	<i>Righteous deeds and moral responsibility</i>	Students apply Islamic values through real activities
Stage 4: Reflection and Presentation	All-dimensional integration	<i>Muhasabah and self-awareness</i>	Spiritual reflection on project outcomes and processes

These findings demonstrate that the integrative model can be implemented in the context of Islamic elementary schools, emphasizing collaboration, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility. Each stage of the project produces not only a product or work, but also a character-building and moral-building experience.

The integration of the Lickona moral framework with the concept of Al-Attas manners in PBL forms a conceptual reconstruction of character learning that is holistic. This model not only organizes the cognitive and affective dimensions but also places spiritual reflection at the core of the learning process. Thus, PBL functions not only as a pedagogical strategy but as a vehicle for internalizing values that connect knowledge, charity, and self-awareness in basic Islamic education.

The Role of Teachers as Catalysts in Character and Moral Formation

Analysis of empirical studies (Fadhilah & Rahmawati, 2023; Mahmud & Yusuf, 2023; Rahman & Husna, 2024) confirms that teachers are a key element in realizing character and moral learning. Within the Lickona–Al-Attas integration framework, teachers act as *muaddib*, educators who not only impart knowledge but also directly instil moral values and morality.

Findings show that teachers are effective in project-based learning when they can:

1. Modelling moral and spiritual behaviour;
2. Guiding students in connecting projects to Islamic values; and
3. Creating a classroom atmosphere that values knowledge and responsibility.

In this context, Al-Attas' concept of *muaddib* provides a more comprehensive framework for the teacher's role than the role of role model in Lickona's theory, because it encompasses comprehensive spiritual and epistemological dimensions.

The role of teachers in this integrative model is transformative, not just instructional. Teachers are the main nodes that connect the dimensions of knowledge, values, and practices in students' learning experiences. Thus, the success of project-based character education in the context of Islamic education is highly dependent on the capacity of teachers to carry out the function of *muaddib* consistently and reflectively.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Overall, the research results produced five main syntheses as a form of conceptual findings from the integration of Lickona and Al-Attas' theories in the context of PjBL:

1. Integration of Moral and Spiritual Values: Effective character education in an Islamic context must encompass both universal moral values (Lickona) and transcendental spiritual values (Al-Attas).
2. Holistic Pedagogical Structure: Project-Based Learning (PjBL) can be an implementation medium for synthesizing these theories because it emphasizes experiential learning, value reflection, and collaborative work.
3. The Teacher's Role as Muaddib: The teacher functions not only as a project facilitator but also as a moral and ethical guide who guides the learning intentions, processes, and outcomes.
4. Values-Based Evaluation: Project success is measured not only by the product but also by the moral development and spiritual awareness of students.
5. Contextual Relevance in Islamic Elementary Schools: This model supports the direction of national and Islamic education, which emphasizes the formation of faithful, responsible, and independent characters

These findings collectively demonstrate that integrating Lickona's character theory and Al-Attas's concept of adab within a Project-Based Learning framework can establish a new paradigm in elementary Islamic education. This paradigm combines the strengths of Western pedagogical structures with the spiritual depth of Islam to create a holistic, contextual, and value-based character education model.

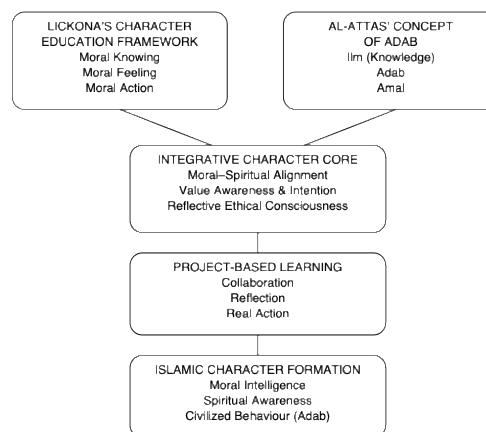


Figure 1. Conceptual Integrative Model of Lickona–Al-Attas Character Education in Project-Based Learning

Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1. This study proposes that Islamic character education becomes more holistic when universal moral cognition is interactively aligned with transcendental spiritual awareness through the concept of adab.

Proposition 2. The integration of Lickona's character education framework and Al-Attas's concept of adab establishes a balanced paradigm that unites ethical behavior with epistemological and spiritual consciousness.

Proposition 3. Project-Based Learning functions as an effective pedagogical vehicle for internalizing moral and spiritual values when learning activities are guided by reflective intention and value-oriented action.

Proposition 4. Teachers in Islamic primary education perform a dual role as pedagogical facilitators and *muaddib*, translating moral understanding into civilized conduct through intentional guidance and modeling.

Proposition 5. The formation of Islamic character is achieved through the simultaneous operation of moral reasoning, emotional reflection, and spiritually grounded action within experiential learning environments.

Analysis/Discussion

The results of this study show that the integration of Thomas Lickona's character education concept with the concept of *Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in the framework of Project-Based Learning (PBL)* offers a new paradigm for the development of character education in Islamic Elementary Schools. This integrative approach shows that effective character education cannot be partial or only emphasize aspects of moral behaviour, but must be holistic, combining moral, spiritual, intellectual, and actionable dimensions in the context of meaningful learning. This model shows that true character formation demands synergy between value awareness, self-reflection, and real practice based on intention and spiritual awareness.

Within this framework, Lickona's theory of character education, which focuses on the three main components of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*, provides a strong conceptual basis to explain the process of character formation through the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor realms. However, Lickona's approach becomes more complete when enriched with *the concept of adab* formulated by Al-Attas. In Al-Attas's view, true education is not only oriented to social morality, but also to the recognition of truth and the order of nature (*haqiqah*), that is, the awareness of man's position before God, nature, and others. Thus, the integration of these two frameworks results in a conceptual model of Islamic character education that places *adab* as the spiritual foundation of all moral processes, as well as *PBL* as a pedagogical vehicle to internalize it in real learning experiences.

This finding strengthens the view of Mahmud & Yusuf (2023) regarding the importance of synthesis between Western moral pedagogy and Islamic education paradigms so that character education is not trapped in behavioral formalities, but is able to form moral consciousness that comes from divine values. At the same time, this finding expands Abdalla's (2025) idea of interpreting Islamic education as a process of *tarbiyah*—the development of the soul, intellectual development, and moral purification. By bridging Lickona's moral-rational approach and Al-Attas's spiritual-transcendental approach, this model provides a new direction of Islamic character education that not only teaches students to do good, but also fosters spiritual awareness in their every moral action.

The results of this study show that the integration of Thomas Lickona's character education concept with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' concept of manners in the framework of Project-Based Learning (PBL) offers a new paradigm for the development of character education in Islamic Elementary Schools. This integrative approach emphasizes that effective character education cannot be partial or only emphasize moral behaviour, but must be holistic by combining moral, spiritual, intellectual, and

action dimensions in a meaningful learning experience. Thus, character formation requires synergy between value awareness, self-reflection, and real practices based on intention and spiritual awareness

In addition, the findings of Kosasih et al. (2022) provide empirical support for the relevance of this approach by showing that Islamic Religious Education teachers in elementary schools assess the development of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) as an important element in the formation of students' character. High-level thinking skills not only play a role in honing logic and creativity but also in fostering reflective awareness that allows students to understand, assess, and think critically and independently. The integration of reflective thinking skills with project-based learning is in line with the principles of experiential moral education in the Lickona framework, as well as leading to a new form of experiential adab education—that is, value learning through projects accompanied by spiritual reflection and social responsibility. Thus, project-based learning designed within the framework of adab not only improves academic achievement, but also brings Islamic values to life contextually and applicably.

In practice, the success of this model depends heavily on the role of the teacher as *muaddib*, which is an educator who not only transfers knowledge but also guides manners and instils good intentions in students. These findings strengthen the research of Fadhilah & Rahmawati (2023), which shows that the effectiveness of character education is greatly influenced by the ability of teachers to build moral relationships and provide exemplary values. Within the framework of Lickona–Al-Attas integration, teachers not only serve as project facilitators but also as spiritual guides who help students associate each learning activity with Islamic values. This role is in line with the view of Al-Attas (1991), who places *muaddib* as a central figure in the formation of civilized human beings through teaching based on knowledge and wisdom.

If, in Lickona's theory, the teacher is positioned as a moral example that directs the ethical behaviour of students, then, from the perspective of Al-Attas the teacher has a broader ontological and epistemological position as the guardian of knowledge and truth. Thus, teachers are not only role models, but also mediators between knowledge and values. The implications of these findings show the need to redefine the role of teachers in Islamic schools to include moral, spiritual, and pedagogical functions in a balanced manner. In line with the idea of Memon (2024), strengthening the role of teachers as *muaddib* requires professional training and recontextualization of the Islamic teacher education curriculum in order to be able to integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects in learning practices.

The Lickona–Al-Attas integration model shows a strong relevance to the characteristics of Islamic basic education in Indonesia, especially in Islamic Elementary Schools, which emphasize the synergy between academic achievement and the formation of Islamic character. These findings support the view of Hidayat & Lestari (2022) who state that religious learning at the elementary level still tends to be cognitive and normative, so that it has not touched on reflective and applicative aspects. This model offers solutions through a Project-Based Learning approach that places project experience as a means of actively and reflective internalization of value. In this context, students are not only the recipients of grades, but also the actors who bring them to life in real actions.

The integration of this model is also in line with the findings of Sánchez-García et al. (2025) regarding the importance of the continuous learning framework in PBL. In

an Islamic perspective, the principle of sustainability can be interpreted as a continuum between knowledge, charity, and morals. Thus, each project not only serves to complete academic tasks but also strengthens the sustainability of moral and spiritual values in the lives of students.

From the theoretical side, this research contributes to the expansion of the discourse of Islamic character education by offering a conceptual model that integrates two major paradigms, namely moral-psychological (Lickona) and philosophical-spiritual (Al-Attas). This model bridges the gap between secular character education that tends to be behaviouristic and religious education that is often normative without an applicative pedagogical mechanism. Through this integration, the formation of Islamic character is placed within the epistemological framework of *adab*, where knowledge and behaviour are directed by the awareness of the truth that comes from God.

In addition to enriching moral education theory, this model also expands the concept of experiential moral education to experiential *adab* education. Within this framework, the learning experience is not just a cognitive or social process, but becomes a space for reflection to discover the spiritual meaning behind each academic activity. Learning values becomes most effective when learners experience, reflect, and practice those values in real-life contexts.

Practically, the results of this study provide development directions for schools, teachers, and Islamic education policy makers. For schools, this model can be the basis for the development of an integrative curriculum that combines academic learning with the formation of manners. For teachers, this model requires strengthening pedagogical and spiritual capacity in order to be able to carry out the role of *muaddib*, who not only guides the understanding of knowledge, but also its practice in a civilized manner. Meanwhile, at the policy level, these findings indicate the need to reform the character assessment system that not only assesses outward behaviour, but also reflects students' values, intentions, and spiritual awareness.

These findings are in line with the recommendations of Dabdoub (2024) and Al-Mahmudi & Zabidi (2023), who encourage character-based school design as a centre of moral and spiritual life, not just an institution for knowledge transmission. Overall, this study confirms that the integration of the concepts of Lickona and Al-Attas within the framework of Project-Based Learning provides a solid conceptual and methodological foundation for Islamic character education in primary schools. This approach shows that morality, spirituality, and *adab* are an inseparable unit in the education system that aims to produce a generation of knowledge and morals. Thus, this integrative model not only strengthens the relevance of Islamic values in modern education but also opens up a space for contextual, reflective, and meaningful pedagogical innovation towards the formation of knowledgeable, civilized, and charitable people as an essential vision of Islamic education.

This research is conceptual and based on literature studies, so it has not been tested through empirical implementation in the classroom. The focus of the study, which focuses on the context of Islamic elementary schools in Indonesia, also limits the generalization of findings to the broader educational context. In addition, although the literature used has been selectively selected and up-to-date, the possibility of other perspectives outside the sources being analysed remains open to consideration in further research.

Further research is recommended to test this conceptual model through empirical studies at various levels and educational contexts to see its effectiveness in the formation of students' character directly. Implementation tests in the school environment with quantitative and mixed methods will enrich the validity of the findings. Thus, the development of this model can obtain a stronger evidentiary basis while expanding its relevance in Islamic educational practice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of Thomas Lickona's character education theory and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' concept of manners in the framework of Project-Based Learning results in a holistic conceptual model of Islamic character education for elementary schools. Character formation in Islamic education does not stop at the mastery of moral knowledge, but must include spiritual awareness, emotional appreciation, and the embodiment of real actions. The synthesis between moral knowing–moral feeling–moral action with '*ilm*–*adab*–'charity forms an integrated educational paradigm in fostering moral intelligence, intellectual humility, and spiritual awareness simultaneously.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic educational discourse by bridging Western moral-psychological approaches and Islamic epistemology, by placing *adab* as an ontological and spiritual foundation, while the Lickona framework serves as an operational pedagogical structure. Practically, this model provides direction for curriculum development, strengthening the role of teachers as *muaddib*, and value-based assessment systems in Islamic schools. Further research is recommended to conduct empirical validation of this conceptual model in various contexts and levels of education.

Overall, the Lickona–Al-Attas integrative model emphasizes that authentic Islamic character education is realized when morality, spirituality, and *adab* are present in the learning design, classroom interactions, reflection of values, and actions of students in daily learning life.

Acknowledgments: The author would like to express his gratitude to the supervising lecturers, colleagues, and educational institutions who have provided academic support and input in the preparation of this research.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in the research process or writing of this article.

REFERENCES

- Abdalla, M. (2025). Exploring tarbiyah in Islamic education: A critical review and implications for teacher education. *Education Sciences*, 15(5), 559. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15050559>
- Agbaria, A. (2024). Education for religion: An Islamic perspective. *Religions*, 15(3), 309. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030309>
- Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1991). *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education*. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC).
- Al-Mahmudi, A., & Zabidi, Z. M. (2023). Integration of Islamic values in character education: A contemporary review. *Journal of Moral Education*, 52(4), 451–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2023.2204567>
- Alsuhaymi, A. O. (2025). The role of ritual prayer (ṣalāh) in self-purification and character formation: Implications for Islamic education. *Religions*, 16(11), 1347. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16111347>
- Althof, W., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2022). Moral education and character education: Their relationship and roles in citizenship education. *Journal of Character Education*, 18(1), 5–20.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Dabdoub, J. P. (2024). Redesigning schools for effective character education: Lessons from contemporary practice. *Journal of Moral Education*, 53(1), 23–39.
- Darmawan, D., & Amini, R. (2023). Strengthening Islamic character education through integrated learning design in elementary schools. *Tadrib: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 9(2), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.19109/tadrib.v9i2.15933>
- Fadhilah, N., & Rahmawati, A. (2023). The role of teachers in implementing project-based learning for moral character formation in Islamic schools. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 20(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.2023.20103>
- Hanifah, S., & Azizah, N. (2024). Internalization of Islamic values in project-based learning: Case study in SDIT Indonesia. *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 13(1), 77–95. <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v13i1.2098>
- Hidayat, R., & Lestari, P. (2022). Integrating character education into Islamic learning at elementary level: A qualitative study. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 12(2), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpk.v12i2.45329>
- Kosasih, A., Supriyadi, T., Firmansyah, M. I., & Rahminawati, N. (2022). Higher-order thinking skills in primary school: Teachers' perceptions of Islamic education.

- Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 45–56.
<https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/994>
- Lee, M.-Y., Huang, C.-W., & Chen, C.-H. (2025). Project-based learning as a catalyst for integrated STEM competencies: A systematic review. *Education Sciences*, 15(7), 871. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070871>
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect And Responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Lickona, T., & Davidson, M. (2023). Teaching for character and competence in the age of AI: Revisiting moral knowing, feeling, and action. *Journal of Character Education*, 19(2), 55–72.
- Mahmud, A., & Yusuf, M. (2023). Islamic moral pedagogy in 21st-century learning: Integrating adab and project-based learning. *International Journal of Islamic Education Research*, 5(2), 87–101. <https://doi.org/10.18860/ijier.v5i2.18471>
- Memon, N. A. (2024). Laying foundations for Islamic teacher education: Introducing a special issue. *Education Sciences*, 14(10), 1046.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14101046>
- Mulyani, N., & Prasetyo, E. (2022). Designing project-based learning for spiritual and moral character development in Islamic elementary schools. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Indonesia*, 7(1), 23–37. <https://doi.org/10.24235/jpii.v7i1.1456>
- Petchamé, J., Marimon-Martí, M., & Romani, J. (2024). Student perceptions of project-based learning when learning Information Systems. *Education Sciences*, 14(11), 1148. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111148>
- Rahman, A., & Husna, L. (2024). Character education through adab-based curriculum in Islamic schools: A conceptual synthesis. *Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 15(1), 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.24042/jies.v15i1.2438>
- Sánchez-García, R., García-González, A., & Abellán, J. (2025). Enhancing project-based learning: A framework for optimizing structural design and implementation—A systematic review with a sustainable focus. *Sustainability*, 17(11), 4978.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su17114978>
- Sari, D. P., & Hadi, F. (2024). The effectiveness of project-based learning in promoting self-regulated and moral behavior among students in Islamic schools. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Islam*, 8(2), 89–105.
- Yusof, N. M., & Idris, F. (2023). Al-Attas' concept of adab and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education reform. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 24(1), 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.24.2023.201>
- Zhang, R., Zhang, X., & Wu, Y. (2023). Research on the quality of collaboration in project-based learning and its effect on learning outcomes. *Sustainability*, 15(15), 11901. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151511901>

