

Development of Students' Social Character through the Internalisation of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Values at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut

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Abstract: Social character education is a key priority in the national education system, particularly at the junior high school level, which represents a crucial developmental stage for adolescents. This study aims to analyze the development of students' social character through the internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values in Social Studies learning at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut. A qualitative design with a phenomenological approach was employed to explore the lived experiences of teachers and students in the value internalization process. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that Aswaja values *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) were translated into social character indicators such as empathy, cooperation, fairness, and social responsibility. These values were internalized through teacher modeling, curriculum integration, and school culture. The process strengthened students' social awareness and moral behavior, indicating that Aswaja-based character education can effectively address moral degradation among adolescents and reinforce the goals of national education.

Keywords: *Social Character, Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Values, Internalization, Social Studies Learning.*

A. Introduction

Social character education has become a global concern amid rising cases of intolerance, polarization, and moral degradation among adolescents (UNESCO, 2023; O'Neill & Smith, 2024). In Indonesia, this issue is increasingly urgent as cases of intolerance and social conflict often involve young people who are still forming their moral and social identity. Therefore, character education has been prioritized as a national strategy through the integration of moral and religious values in the national curriculum (Alhamuddin, 2024; Farwati, Iskhak, & Mahnun, 2023). Junior high school represents a critical phase in this process because it is the period when students begin to develop a stable social identity and value orientation. Early cultivation of social character can foster empathy, integrity, and the ability to live harmoniously in a multicultural society. Social Studies education plays a central role in this mission, as it not only develops factual knowledge but also strengthens civic awareness, social solidarity, and responsibility (La Ical Salama, 2024).

Theoretical perspectives emphasize that Social Studies serves as an integrative learning framework that connects cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains to foster holistic student development. Through Social Studies, students learn to analyze social phenomena, develop empathy, and apply moral reasoning in real life contexts. Recent research highlights that the effectiveness of Social Studies lies in its participatory and reflective nature, which allows value internalization through discussion, case analysis, and collaborative learning (Hasanah & Prasetyo, 2024; Sutisna & Kurnia, 2023). Therefore, Social Studies becomes a strategic medium for shaping students' social character, as it not only builds intellectual understanding but also nurtures attitudes and behaviors consistent with democratic and ethical values (Wijaya, 2024).

Within this integrative framework, the values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* (Aswaja) become highly relevant because they provide moral and social foundations aligned with the objectives of Social Studies education. Aswaja emphasizes *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) principles that foster democratic, inclusive, and respectful attitudes toward diversity. These values correspond with the essence of Social Studies, which aims to cultivate civic responsibility, empathy, and social harmony among students (Ikhsan, Hidayat, & Nurhayati, 2024; Suhendar, 2024). Integrating Aswaja values into learning activities allows students to internalize moral reasoning while engaging with real social issues, thereby making moral education contextual and transformative (Rahman, 2023). Thus, Aswaja based Social Studies learning offers a framework not only for understanding societal dynamics but also for nurturing balanced and tolerant citizens in a plural society.

However, existing studies on Aswaja based education often adopt descriptive or policy oriented approaches, focusing primarily on institutional culture, curriculum design, or school programs without deeply probing classroom realities (Alhamuddin, 2024; Rahman, 2023). While such studies highlight the importance of Aswaja principles in shaping school identity, they rarely explore how these values are internalized by teachers and students through the lived processes of teaching and learning. Consequently, the experiential dimension of value embodiment how *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and other Aswaja values are practiced in classroom interactions remains underexplored.

Addressing this research gap, the present study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Social Studies teachers and students in internalizing *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* (Aswaja) values. This approach enables a deep understanding of how moral, religious, and social values are constructed, practiced, and meaningfully experienced in classroom life. By focusing on the participants' subjective experiences, this study seeks to uncover the dynamic process through which *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and other Aswaja principles are translated into students' social character. The insights derived from this phenomenological inquiry are expected to contribute both theoretically by enriching the discourse on character education grounded in Islamic moderation and practically by providing models for the implementation of value based Social Studies learning in Indonesian schools.

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates civic moral education, social constructivism, and the ethical framework of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) to explain how values are internalized through Social Studies learning. Civic moral education positions schools as moral communities that cultivate ethical reasoning, civic responsibility, and prosocial behavior through participatory learning (Prayogi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, social constructivism emphasizes that knowledge and values are co-constructed through interaction, dialogue, and shared reflection among teachers and students (Barak & Green, 2021; Choi et al., 2024). When combined, these frameworks illuminate how Aswaja values such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) are not transmitted as static doctrines but socially constructed as ethical orientations through classroom discourse, teacher modeling, and collaborative meaning-making.

Empirical studies also support this integration, showing that Aswaja based education effectively strengthens moral character and social harmony when embedded in classroom practice (Widiyono, 2022; Zainudin et al., 2025). Accordingly, Social Studies serves as an ethical space where civic and religious values converge, enabling students to develop democratic and inclusive dispositions aligned with Indonesia's educational vision.

This study's novelty lies in its phenomenological exploration of how teachers and students subjectively experience the internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values within Social Studies learning. Unlike previous research that mainly focused on policy frameworks or school culture, this study captures the lived processes through which Aswaja values moderation, balance, tolerance, and justice are enacted and co-constructed in classroom interactions. By integrating the perspectives of civic-moral education and social constructivism, this research provides new insights into how ethical and civic values are intertwined in educational practice. The findings are expected to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for strengthening character education in plural and democratic societies.

B. Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design using Moustakas' phenomenological approach, which is highly appropriate for understanding the essence of subjective experiences of educational actors in the internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values within Social Studies learning. The phenomenological approach focuses on exploring lived experiences through *epoche* (bracketing), phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation to uncover the essence of meaning (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Participants included Social Studies teachers, the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, and students, representing the key agents in the process of value internalization. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This analytical process was employed to ensure a systematic and transparent interpretation of phenomenological data while maintaining fidelity to the participants' lived meanings.

Participants and Research Sites

The research was conducted at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut, a religious based institution that prioritizes the development of students' social character through Social Studies learning. The site was selected purposively because it represents a distinctive and well structured model of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) based education in the region. Unlike most religious schools that apply Aswaja principles primarily within religious subjects, SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut integrates Aswaja values across the curriculum particularly in Social Studies, civic education, and extracurricular programs through systematic lesson design, reflective discussions, and school-wide culture building.

This integration has produced an institutional environment characterized by religious moderation (*tawasuth*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and social responsibility, aligning with the national vision of strengthening students' moral and civic character. Consequently, this site provides a relevant and exemplary context for exploring how Aswaja values are internalized through daily pedagogical practices and student-teacher interactions.

The participants included one Social Studies teacher, the school principal, one vice principal for curriculum, and six students actively engaged in Social Studies learning. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key actors involved in both policy formulation and classroom practice. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of how values are experienced and embodied at multiple institutional levels (Palinkas et al., 2023).

Data Collection

The data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In depth interviews were conducted with teachers, school leaders, and students to explore their subjective experiences in integrating Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values particularly *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) within Social Studies learning. The interview guidelines were designed to align with these values and focused on:

1. Teachers' pedagogical strategies for embedding Aswaja-based moral and social values in classroom learning.
2. Students' interpretations and enactments of Aswaja principles in classroom and peer interactions.
3. School leaders' institutional perspectives and policies that support the internalization of Aswaja values across the curriculum.

Participatory observation was carried out during Social Studies lessons and extracurricular activities, focusing on how Aswaja values manifested in real classroom life. Special attention was given to:

1. *Tawasuth* = moderation and fairness in classroom discussions and conflict resolution.
2. *Tasamuh* = tolerance and respect in teacher-student and peer interactions.

3. Tawazun = balance between academic performance and moral behaviour.
4. I'tidal = justice and responsibility in collaborative tasks.

Field notes captured instructional dialogues, classroom dynamics, reflective discussions, and spontaneous moral decision-making moments, representing the living expression of Aswaja principles in practice. Document analysis included reviewing lesson plans, syllabi, and school policy documents related to Aswaja based character education to identify how these values were structurally and pedagogically embedded in the curriculum. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews, observations, and document reviews (Carter et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the phenomenological procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994), complemented by the systematic data management framework of Miles and Huberman (1994). The use of Moustakas' method was considered most appropriate because the study aimed to reveal the essence of subjective experiences of teachers and students in internalizing Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values within Social Studies learning.

In line with Moustakas' phenomenology, the analysis began with epoche (bracketing), in which the researcher consciously set aside prior assumptions to focus on participants' lived experiences. This was followed by phenomenological reduction, involving repeated reading of transcripts to identify significant statements related to the internalization of Aswaja values particularly tawasuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice). Through imaginative variation, these statements were clustered into thematic meanings that described the structure of experience.

To ensure analytical rigor and transparency, the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994) comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification was employed as a complementary tool. This model supported the phenomenological process by organizing qualitative data systematically, enabling the researcher to maintain coherence between participants' narratives and the emerging themes.

The integration of Moustakas' philosophical depth with Miles and Huberman's analytical structure allowed for both conceptual richness and methodological precision, ensuring that the essence of participants' lived experiences was captured authentically while grounded in a clear analytical procedure.

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied the four classic criteria of qualitative rigor credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In addition, contemporary validation strategies were incorporated to enhance methodological robustness (Nowell et al., 2017; Morse, 2022).

Credibility was established through methodological and source triangulation, combining in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis across different participant groups teachers, school leaders, and students (Carter et al., 2023). Transferability was supported through thick description of the school's cultural and pedagogical context, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other educational settings.

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a systematic audit trail documenting every phase of the research process, including data collection, coding, and interpretation. All transcripts, observation notes, and analytical memos were chronologically archived and cross-checked to maintain interpretive consistency over time. Confirmability was strengthened by aligning the analytical outcomes with raw data and conducting peer debriefing sessions to minimize researcher bias.

Collectively, these validation strategies reinforced the scientific rigor of the phenomenological inquiry and ensured the authentic representation of participants' lived experiences.

C. Results and Discussion

The Results and Discussion section presents the findings on the development of students' social character through the internalization of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values in Social Studies learning at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut. The discussion is structured around four key foci aligned with the research objectives: (1) the Aswaja values embedded in Social Studies education, (2) the strategies and pedagogical approaches for internalizing these values in classroom practice, (3) the rationale for integrating Aswaja values in developing students' social character, and (4) the challenges encountered and solutions implemented during the internalization process.

Each subsection integrates field data, participant narratives, and theoretical interpretation, cross-referenced with relevant findings from national (Sinta-indexed) and international (Scopus-indexed) journals. This organization provides a coherent analytical framework that links Aswaja values to educational strategies, their moral and civic significance, and the practical challenges of implementation illustrating the holistic process of value-based character education within the Social Studies context.

Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Values in Social Studies Education at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut

Field findings reveal that Social Studies teachers at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut systematically integrated Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values particularly *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance) into specific classroom topics. For example, in the Social Conflict module, students analysed historical and contemporary cases of communal disputes in Indonesia by examining multiple perspectives and formulating balanced solutions that respect diversity. This activity represents the practice of *tawasuth*, where students are encouraged to avoid extreme judgments and to uphold justice and inclusivity in problem-solving.

In lessons on cultural diversity, teachers fostered *tasamuh* and *tawazun* by facilitating

discussions about religious, ethnic, and regional differences, highlighting the importance of empathy and mutual respect in maintaining social harmony. Such learning experiences reflect character education principles that connect moral values to behavioural expression (Lickona, 2021) and promote democratic civic dispositions (Hidayat & Nurdin, 2024).

The value of amanah (honesty and responsibility) was cultivated in economic topics, where students engaged in simulations of production and consumption, evaluating ethical choices in economic transactions. This exercise not only developed economic literacy but also strengthened moral accountability (Ilaihi, Zuhriyah, & Yusuf, 2024). Likewise, ukhuwah (brotherhood) was reinforced through group projects and collaborative discussions, which encouraged respect for peers' opinions and inclusion across diverse backgrounds. These activities position the classroom as a "moral laboratory" (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2022), enhancing students' empathy and social solidarity (Abdurrohman & Fitriana, 2023).

Overall, the findings confirm that Aswaja values were not treated as abstract doctrines but were concretely enacted through Social Studies materials and pedagogy. This integrative approach bridges the gap between moral theory and classroom practice, offering a contextualised model of value-based education suited to Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Approaches and Strategies for Internalising Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Values in Social Studies Learning at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut

Social Studies teachers at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut apply multiple pedagogical strategies to internalise Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values in classroom learning. One major approach is contextual learning, where lessons are linked to local social realities. For example, in the topic of social interaction, teachers connect theoretical concepts with the practice of tolerance within Garut's pesantren based community culture. This approach aligns with Listiyani et al. (2024), who found that embedding religious moderation in the curriculum is most effective when contextualised within local sociocultural settings.

Among the strategies employed, the exemplary model (uswah hasanah) and written value reflection emerge as the most transformative. The uswah hasanah strategy positions teachers as moral exemplars demonstrating fairness, openness, and respect for diverse opinions in classroom interactions. Through daily observation of teacher behaviour, students internalise values such as tawasuth (moderation) and tasamuh (tolerance), transforming abstract cognitive understanding into affective and behavioural practice. This finding echoes Rohmaniah, Bustomi, and Zulihi (2024), who emphasised that moral modelling is a key mechanism in the internalisation of religious moderation values in pesantren-based curricula.

Similarly, written value reflection allows students to translate learning into personal moral awareness. Through essays or observation reports, they analyse real-life community practices and relate them to Aswaja principles. Such reflective writing serves as a bridge between thought and action encouraging students to evaluate, personalise, and embody moral values. This approach is supported by Fathunnajih et al.

(2024), who found that reflective practices within religious moderation curricula enhance students' ability to operationalise moral concepts in daily life.

Complementing these core strategies, teachers also use group discussions to cultivate *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *tawazun* (balance), encouraging respect for differing views and collective decision-making consistent with social constructivist learning principles (Listiyani et al., 2024; Nurdin et al., 2024).

Overall, the combination of contextual learning, *uswah hasanah*, written reflection, and group discussion creates an integrated pedagogical design that connects the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of Social Studies learning. This comprehensive approach demonstrates how *Aswaja* based education transforms moral understanding into social character behaviour bridging the gap between value cognition and moral action in secondary school contexts.

Reasons for Social Character Development through Internalisation of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Values in Social Studies Learning at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut

The development of students' social character through the internalisation of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (*Aswaja*) values in Social Studies education is crucial because schooling must not only enhance cognitive skills but also foster moral integrity and social ethics. Social Studies, as a discipline that examines human interaction and social responsibility, provides a strategic medium to cultivate *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood). As noted by Anwar and Rahmat (2023), integrating religious moderation values into Social Studies strengthens civic awareness and acts as a moral-preventive mechanism against moral degradation among youth.

Moreover, *Aswaja* values hold sociological significance in Indonesia's pluralistic society. In Garut a region rooted in *pesantren* traditions moderation and tolerance function as cultural mechanisms that sustain harmony and reduce conflict potential. Religious moderation education has been shown to significantly reduce intolerance and radical tendencies among adolescents (Fauzi & Hidayat, 2023). Thus, SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut bears a moral mandate to cultivate inclusivity and social unity through learning activities grounded in *Aswaja* principles.

The internalisation of *Aswaja* values also enhances students' socio-emotional competence. Teachers who contextualise *amanah* (trustworthiness), *mas'uliyah* (responsibility), and *ukhuwah* within classroom discussions enable students to translate moral ideas into real social practices. Empirical evidence shows that value-based learning effectively nurtures empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills (Wijaya et al., 2024).

Finally, the implementation of *Aswaja*-based character education aligns with Garut's local wisdom and *pesantren* heritage. Local culture based moral education has proven more effective than purely cognitive approaches in fostering national character and moral resilience (Sulaiman & Syafika, 2023). Therefore, SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut integrates *Aswaja* not merely as theological doctrine but as a locally grounded ethical framework that contextualises Social Studies learning.

In summary, the integration of Aswaja values in Social Studies functions as both a moral-preventive and sociocultural strategy to develop students' social character, aligning religious ethics, cultural identity, and civic responsibility within one coherent educational framework.

Challenges and Solutions in the Implementation of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Values in Social Studies Learning at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut

The implementation of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values in Social Studies learning at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut encounters two main challenges: student heterogeneity and teacher competency.

1. Student heterogeneity.

Students come from diverse religious and socio-cultural backgrounds, leading to varying interpretations of Aswaja principles such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood). This diversity can create differing levels of understanding and even potential misinterpretation of moderation values. As Anshori (2024) notes, such heterogeneity demands dialogical and contextual pedagogical approaches to avoid exclusivism.

Solution: Social Studies teachers at SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut address this issue through contextual and dialogical learning. Classroom discussions are designed to connect Aswaja values with students' real-life social experiences, allowing shared reflection and value negotiation. This method fosters internalization through understanding rather than indoctrination, ensuring inclusivity across backgrounds.

2. Teacher competency.

While most teachers possess strong religious foundations, many face challenges in translating Aswaja values into creative and student-centered pedagogical practices. Mulyana and Rahman (2023) emphasize that limited professional development opportunities reduce teachers' ability to design effective value-based instruction.

Solution: The school implements adaptive professional training and Aswaja Digital Literacy programs. Regular workshops focus on designing reflective learning modules and integrating Aswaja ethics into Social Studies topics. Meanwhile, Aswaja Digital Literacy encourages the use of digital platforms such as interactive media, online discussions, and digital storytelling to promote values of moderation, tolerance, and justice. As Fitriani and Yusuf (2024) found, integrating religious moderation into digital literacy enhances students' moral reasoning and social empathy in the digital era.

In summary, addressing these challenges requires continuous pedagogical innovation and digital adaptation. SMP Fauzaniyyah Garut demonstrates that the internalization of Aswaja values can remain relevant and transformative by combining contextual reflection, teacher upskilling, and digital engagement strategies.

D. Conclusions

This study concludes that the internalisation of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values in Social Studies learning enriches both the philosophical and practical dimensions of education. By positioning Aswaja as the moral foundation of Social Studies, teachers are able to transform religious and ethical principles such as tawasuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), and ukhuwah (brotherhood) into meaningful learning experiences that shape students' social character. Thus, Social Studies functions not merely as cognitive instruction but as a process of value based character formation.

The study also introduces Aswaja Digital Literacy as an innovative model to address the challenges of the digital era. Integrating Aswaja values into digital learning platforms fosters students' moral reasoning, critical awareness, and ethical use of technology. This model bridges traditional religious moderation with contemporary digital culture, providing a relevant and sustainable framework for 21st-century character education.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that Aswaja based Social Studies learning strengthens the moral foundation of education and offers a transformative pathway toward cultivating moderate, tolerant, and socially responsible citizens.

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