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Transforming Character Education through KH. Zaini Mun'im's Thought: Relevance of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* for Millennial Moral Development

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Abstract: Contemporary character education models frequently emphasize cognitive and behavioral dimensions while paying limited attention to spiritual foundations. Addressing this gap, this study aims to examine KH. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education, as articulated in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*, and its relevance to ethical challenges in the digital era. This study employed a qualitative library research design using *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* as the primary source and scholarly publications on Islamic education, character education, and digital ethics as secondary sources. Data were collected through document analysis and analyzed using descriptive-analytical and hermeneutic approaches to interpret key concepts and reconstruct their educational implications. The findings reveal that KH. Zaini Mun'im conceptualizes character education as an integrated framework in which *husnul khuluq* serves as the central principle that connects spiritual consciousness, moral habituation, ethical communication, and social responsibility. Character is understood as the manifestation of faith through empathy, respect, accountability, self-control, and constructive social interaction. The study also demonstrates that the ethical values embedded in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* remain relevant for addressing digital communication ethics, cyber misconduct, and declining social empathy. The originality of this study lies in its reconstruction of KH. Zaini Mun'im's educational thought into a faith-based, transformative character education framework that integrates spiritual, moral, social, and digital dimensions. This study advances Islamic character education theory by providing a conceptually grounded, contextually relevant model for contemporary educational practice.

***Abstrak**: Pendidikan karakter kontemporer cenderung menitikberatkan aspek kognitif dan perilaku, sementara dimensi spiritual masih kurang mendapat perhatian. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji konsep pendidikan karakter menurut KH. Zaini Mun'im dalam Nadhom Syu'abul Iman serta relevansinya terhadap tantangan etika di era digital. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan Nadhom Syu'abul Iman sebagai sumber primer dan berbagai publikasi ilmiah tentang pendidikan Islam, pendidikan karakter, serta etika digital sebagai sumber sekunder. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen dan dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis dan hermeneutik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa KH. Zaini Mun'im memandang pendidikan karakter sebagai kerangka integratif yang menempatkan husnul khuluq sebagai inti yang menghubungkan kesadaran spiritual, pembiasaan moral, komunikasi etis, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Karakter dipahami sebagai manifestasi iman yang tercermin dalam empati, penghormatan kepada sesama, akuntabilitas, pengendalian diri, dan interaksi sosial yang konstruktif. Temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa nilai-nilai dalam Nadhom Syu'abul Iman tetap relevan untuk menjawab persoalan etika komunikasi digital, penyimpangan perilaku daring, dan menurunnya empati sosial. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada rekonstruksi pemikiran KH. Zaini Mun'im menjadi kerangka pendidikan karakter transformatif berbasis iman yang mengintegrasikan dimensi spiritual, moral, sosial, dan digital. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori pendidikan karakter Islam sekaligus menawarkan model konseptual yang relevan bagi praktik pendidikan kontemporer.*

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INTRODUCTION

Rapid societal change driven by digital technology has profoundly altered patterns of behavior, communication, and social interaction, particularly among the millennial generation. Digital platforms provide unprecedented access to information and connectivity; however, they also generate complex ethical challenges, including the normalization of disrespectful behavior, intolerance, declining empathy, and uncivil discourse (Arifin et al., 2023; Hafiz, 2022; Nasar et al., 2024). Amid the overwhelming flow of information, students often struggle to distinguish between morally appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Fahmi et al., 2024; Syah et al., 2020), especially when social media functions as their primary mode of communication. Although educational institutions continue to promote character education (Chowdhury, 2016; Muhajir, 2022), the influence of digital popular culture frequently undermines these efforts, creating a widening gap between the intended objectives of character education and students' actual behavior, particularly regarding social ethics, discipline, and empathy (Arif et al., 2024; Eka & Pandin, 2021; Fadilah & Pandin, 2021; Herak, 2025). This situation highlights the urgent need for a more contextual, integrative, and transformative approach to character education that strengthens students' moral and spiritual foundations while simultaneously addressing cognitive and behavioral dimensions (Nurhikmah, 2024; S. N. Rogahang, 2024; Sirait, 2023).

Character and moral education have been extensively discussed in international scholarship across diverse domains, including global citizenship, moral psychology, and digital ethics. Recent studies emphasize the importance of empathy, ethical reasoning, and responsible digital behavior in addressing moral challenges within technology-mediated societies (Budiman et al., 2022; Chan & Lee, 2023). Nevertheless, many contemporary approaches remain grounded in instrumental and secular paradigms that separate transcendent and spiritual values from moral conduct, thereby limiting the development of deeply internalized moral consciousness. In contrast, Islamic educational thought conceptualizes character education as an integrative synthesis of morality (*akhlaq*), faith (*iman*), and social responsibility, in which ethical behavior is inseparable from spiritual commitment.

Despite its conceptual richness, research on Islamic pedagogy remains fragmented and generally follows three major trajectories. First, normative-theological approaches, such as those derived from Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's framework, emphasize moral instruction and value transmission (Haryoko, 2024) but often lack contextual internalization in complex contemporary settings. Second, philosophical-spiritual approaches rooted in classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali prioritize spiritual purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) and moral discipline (Nurhikmah, 2024), yet frequently treat moral values as static and insufficiently responsive to contemporary socio-digital realities. Third, pedagogical-instrumental approaches focus on instructional strategies and teacher competence in the digital era (Ismail et al., 2020), often overlooking deeper ethical and spiritual dimensions. Additional studies examining classical texts such as *Akhlaq lil Banat* (Fajri & Mukaroma, 2021;

Muhyiddin et al., 2022) offer valuable insights into moral habituation but remain limited to micro-level applications and do not provide a broader conceptual integration capable of addressing contemporary moral challenges.

Taken together, these studies reveal a significant research gap: the absence of an integrative, contextually grounded framework that connects traditional Islamic ethics, pedagogical practice, and contemporary moral challenges through a dynamic, hermeneutic reconstruction of classical thought. This gap is further evident in the limited scholarly engagement with local Nusantara Muslim scholars, whose intellectual contributions remain underexplored compared with those of globally recognized figures such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun (Aryadiningrat et al., 2023; Rahman & Wahab, 2025).

Within this context, KH. Zaini Mun'im emerges as a significant yet underrepresented intellectual figure. His approach to character education, rooted in *pesantren* tradition and influenced by Sufi pedagogy, emphasizes self-discipline, purification of the heart, and continuous moral habituation. His work, *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* (Zaini, 2012), systematically articulates the relationship between faith and moral conduct through poetic expressions designed to facilitate the internalization of ethical values. Through the concept of *husnul khuluq*, this work integrates spiritual awareness, ethical behavior, and social interaction into a coherent pedagogical framework. Consequently, it offers a culturally grounded and pedagogically relevant alternative for addressing the moral challenges faced by the millennial generation in an era characterized by rapid change, individualism, and ethical ambiguity.

Despite its potential significance, scholarly engagement with KH. Zaini Mun'im's thought remains limited. Existing studies (Biantoro, 2019; Husaeni, 2023; Ismail et al., 2020; Mursidi et al., 2021; Rohaeni et al., 2021) are predominantly descriptive and have not reconstructed his ideas into an applicable framework for contemporary educational contexts. Furthermore, there remains a lack of methodological integration between textual analysis of classical Islamic works and contextual insights from educational practitioners. As a result, practical, context-sensitive models capable of addressing contemporary ethical issues, such as digital behavior, social responsibility, and moral decision-making, remain underdeveloped.

To address this gap, the present study reconstructs KH. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education as articulated in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* through a contextual and hermeneutic approach. The originality of this study lies in three principal contributions. First, it positions a local Nusantara Muslim scholar within the broader discourse of global character education. Second, it develops an integrative framework that connects traditional Islamic ethical principles with contemporary concerns, including empathy, moral responsibility, and digital ethics. Third, it bridges theory and practice by synthesizing textual analysis with contextual insights derived from *pesantren*-based educational traditions.

Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: *How can KH. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education, as presented in Nadhom Syu'abul Iman, can be reconceptualized as an integrative, contextually relevant framework for addressing the ethical challenges of the millennial generation in the digital era.* Theoretically, this study contributes to advancing Islamic education, particularly in the domain of character education grounded in Nusantara Islamic traditions (Hendrastomo &

Januarti, 2023; Listyaningsih et al., 2021). Practically, it offers educators and educational institutions an alternative paradigm for implementing character education that is culturally relevant, spiritually grounded, and responsive to contemporary challenges (Febriani & Ritonga, 2022; Jariah et al., 2024). Ultimately, this study enriches the discourse on character education by incorporating underrepresented perspectives from *pesantren* traditions and proposing a framework capable of addressing the moral complexities of contemporary society (Azmiyah & Astutik, 2021; Mariyono, 2025; Radino & Mubarok, 2025).

Building on the identified research gap, this study aims to reconstruct KH critically. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education as articulated in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*, and to examine its relevance for addressing contemporary moral challenges in the digital era. By employing a contextual-hermeneutic analysis of the text and synthesizing it with contemporary discussions on character education, digital ethics, and Islamic pedagogy, this study seeks to develop a transformative framework that integrates faith, morality, and social responsibility. Such a framework is expected to contribute not only to enriching Islamic educational theory but also to developing culturally grounded, contextually responsive character education models capable of addressing the ethical complexities faced by contemporary generations.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design using a *library research* approach (Busetto et al., 2020; Donkoh, 2023; Elliott, 2001). This approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on examining and interpreting the ideas, concepts, and values presented in the written text, "*Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*" by KH. Zaini Abdul Mun'im is serving as the primary source. Rather than collecting field data, the study relied on a comprehensive examination of classical and contemporary literature to explore character education from conceptual, philosophical, and normative perspectives and to examine its relevance to the moral development of the millennial generation (Lopez et al., 2021).

The research procedure consisted of several interconnected stages. First, primary and secondary data sources relevant to the research objectives were identified and selected. Second, scholarly literature was collected from various academic databases and publications. Third, the collected materials were screened and classified based on relevance, credibility, and theoretical contribution. Fourth, the selected data were analyzed through a hermeneutic approach to understand the text contextually and critically. Finally, the findings were interpreted and synthesized to formulate a reconstructed framework of character education that is relevant to contemporary educational challenges.

Data Sources

This study utilized both primary and secondary sources to ensure analytical depth and conceptual rigor. The primary source was KH. Zaini Mun'im's *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*, which served as the central text for hermeneutic interpretation. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and other scholarly publications on character education, Islamic pedagogy, *pesantren* traditions, moral education, and hermeneutic studies. The integration of primary and secondary sources enabled a comprehensive

analysis while enhancing the validity and credibility of the findings (Utami et al., 2022).

Criteria for Selecting Secondary Literature

Secondary literature was selected through a systematic and criterion-based process to ensure both relevance and academic quality (Utami et al., 2022). Inclusion criteria comprised studies that addressed character education, Islamic pedagogy, moral development, *pesantren* education, and related philosophical or hermeneutic perspectives. Only publications from reputable academic publishers, indexed journals, and recognized scholarly institutions were included. To ensure contemporary relevance, priority was given to publications from 2010 to 2026. In addition, studies were selected for their theoretical relevance to character education and for their contribution to the interpretation of Islamic educational thought.

Databases and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted between January and March 2026 using several academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Garuda, and DOAJ (Lopez et al., 2021). The search strategy employed a combination of keywords such as "character education," "*pesantren* education," "Islamic moral education," "hermeneutics in Islamic studies," "*Syu'abul Iman*," and "KH. Zaini Mun'im." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine and expand search results, thereby improving both sensitivity and specificity (Hardani & Ustiawaty, 2020). This systematic strategy ensured comprehensive retrieval of relevant studies and minimized the risk of overlooking significant literature.

Number and Selection of Articles

The article selection process followed a structured, transparent, multi-stage procedure. An initial pool of approximately 85 records was identified through database searches. These records underwent title and abstract screening, resulting in 45 potentially relevant studies. Subsequently, a full-text review was conducted to evaluate conceptual relevance, methodological quality, and theoretical contribution, yielding 28 eligible studies. From these, 20 core articles were purposively selected as the primary analytical corpus. Although this procedure resembles systematic review screening processes, it was used as a qualitative, interpretative selection strategy rather than a formal PRISMA-based systematic review. The final selection was considered sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation and conceptual depth for hermeneutic interpretation.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure consistency and objectivity, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied throughout the selection process. Studies were included if they (1) discussed character education from Islamic or *pesantren* perspectives, (2) adopted conceptual, philosophical, pedagogical, or theoretical approaches, and (3) were available in full-text form. Conversely, studies were excluded if they were non-academic publications, duplicate records, inaccessible full texts, or unrelated to the focus of character education and Islamic educational thought. These criteria ensured that only relevant and academically credible sources were incorporated into the analysis.

Data Analysis and Hermeneutic Reconstruction Procedure

Data were analyzed using a hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes contextual interpretation and the reconstruction of meaning within historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts (Borg, 1983; Wang, 2024). The analytical process involved four interrelated stages. First, textual analysis was conducted through repeated, intensive examination of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* to identify key concepts, themes, and ethical values related to character education. Second, contextual interpretation was performed by situating the text within the intellectual tradition of KH. Zaini Mun'im, the *pesantren* educational environment, and broader Islamic educational discourse. Third, thematic coding was used to classify recurring concepts, including *iman*, *husnul khuluq*, moral habituation, ethical communication, and social responsibility. Finally, conceptual reconstruction was undertaken by synthesizing the identified themes with contemporary discussions on character education, digital ethics, and moral development.

The analysis was further guided by Gadamer's concept of the *fusion of horizons*, which seeks to establish a dialogue between classical texts and contemporary realities. Through this process, the ethical principles contained in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* were interpreted and reconstructed to address current moral challenges faced by the millennial generation, particularly those arising from digital culture and social transformation.

Table 1. Literature Review on Character Education Transformation and Its Significance for Millennial Development

No.	Author(s)	Main Focus	Research Gap	Relevance to Current Study
1	Zaini Abdul Mun'im (2012)	Character education based on *syu'abul iman* values in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*	Lacks contextual interpretation for millennial moral challenges	Serves as the primary theoretical foundation
2	Fahmi et al. (2024)	Religious-based child-friendly schools for character development	Does not integrate classical Islamic educational thought	Provides a contemporary implementation context
3	Arif et al. (2024)	Trends in character education research in Islamic elementary schools	Limited discussion of classical Islamic sources	Provides an overview of current research developments
4	Eka & Pandin (2021)	Importance of character education in the digital era	Does not incorporate Islamic faith-based values	Strengthens the urgency of millennial character education
5	Nurhikmah (2024)	Character education from Al-Ghazali's perspective	Limited to Al-Ghazali and excludes KH. Zaini Mun'im's thought	Offers a comparative Islamic perspective
6	Ismail et al. (2020)	Competencies of Islamic education teachers in the Industrial Revolution era	Does not connect teacher competence with faith-based character formation	Highlights contemporary educational challenges
7	Aryadiningrat et al. (2023)	Development of discipline and responsibility through character education	Lacks a theological foundation for character formation	Supports key character dimensions
8	Rahman & Wahab (2025)	Influence of character education on youth	Does not employ classical Islamic	Reinforces the importance of

		morality	conceptual frameworks	character education outcomes
9	Jakandar et al. (2025)	Integration of religious values in character education	Does not explore literary forms such as *nadhom* as educational media	Supports value-based character formation
10	Huda et al. (2024)	Character education in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*	Focuses only on Al-Zarnuji's work and not *Syu'abul Iman* values	Provides a comparison with classical Islamic literature
Research Gap		Previous studies have examined character education from contemporary, pedagogical, and classical Islamic perspectives. However, no study has specifically reconstructed KH. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* and contextualized its relevance to the moral development of the millennial generation in the digital era.		

The studies reviewed in Table 1 demonstrate a growing scholarly interest in faith-based character education and provide a strong conceptual foundation for examining KH. Zaini Mun'im's educational thought. The primary source, *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*, offers a comprehensive framework that integrates faith, morality, spirituality, and social responsibility within a unified conception of character education. Meanwhile, the secondary literature highlights various dimensions of character development, including religious-based educational programs, moral formation in Islamic schools, teacher competence, digital-era challenges, and classical Islamic perspectives on ethics and moral cultivation. Collectively, these studies indicate that character education remains a critical concern in contemporary educational discourse while also underscoring the need for a more integrative framework that connects classical Islamic thought with present-day moral challenges.

Furthermore, the reviewed literature demonstrates that character education must be responsive to changing social realities while maintaining its ethical and spiritual foundations. Existing studies provide valuable insights into religious values, moral habituation, discipline, responsibility, and educational practices; however, they rarely reconstruct these elements within a coherent framework rooted in local Nusantara Islamic scholarship. This gap reinforces the significance of the present study, which seeks to reconstruct KH. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education through a contextual-hermeneutic approach, and to examine its relevance for addressing contemporary ethical challenges faced by the millennial generation.

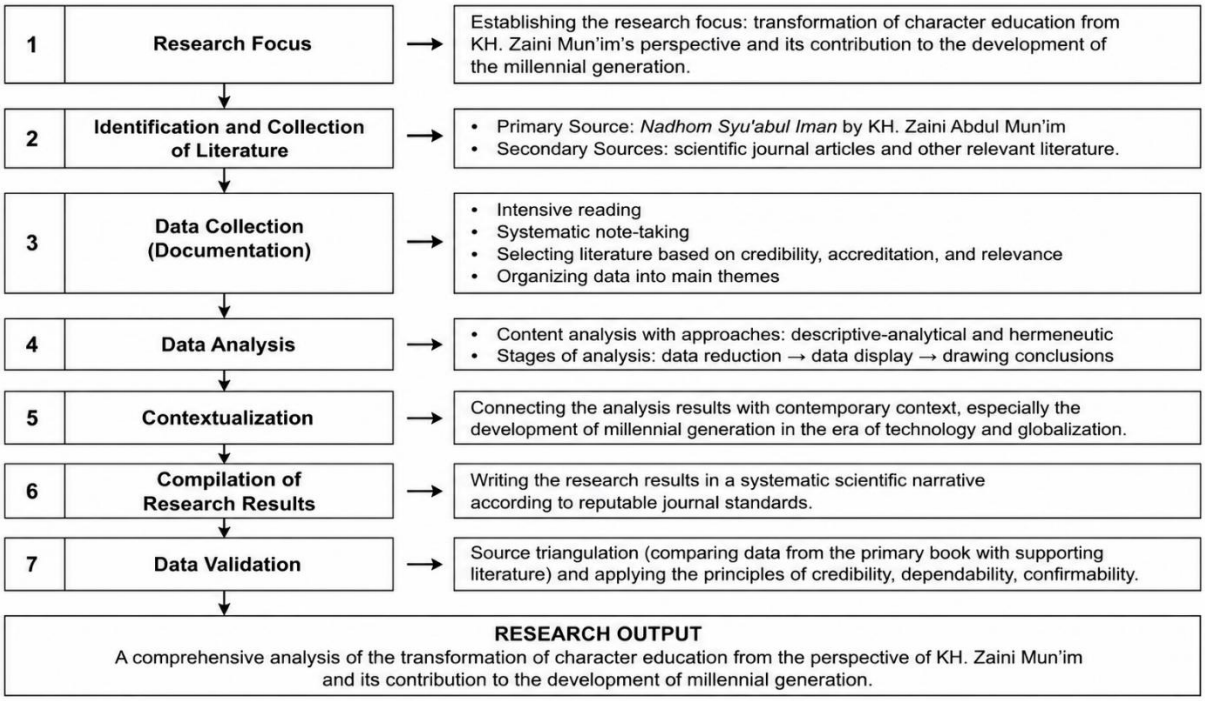

Figure 1. Research Procedure and Analytical Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the overall research procedure and analytical framework employed in this study. The process began with the identification of the research focus concerning the reconstruction of character education from KH. Zaini Mun'im's perspective and its relevance to the moral development of the millennial generation. Subsequently, primary and secondary literature relevant to the research objectives was systematically identified and collected. Particular attention was given to *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* as the primary source, complemented by scholarly literature addressing character education, Islamic pedagogy, and moral development.

The collected materials were then subjected to intensive reading, classification, and thematic organization to identify key concepts and ethical principles related to character formation. Data analysis was conducted through a combination of content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, enabling the researcher to examine both the textual meaning and the broader socio-historical context of KH. Zaini Mun'im's thought. Through this process, classical ethical concepts were interpreted and reconstructed in relation to contemporary educational realities.

The findings were subsequently contextualized within current discussions on character education, particularly those related to digital transformation, social change, and the moral challenges faced by the millennial generation. The reconstructed framework was then synthesized into a coherent analytical model and presented in a systematic scientific narrative. To ensure analytical rigor, source triangulation and interpretative validation were applied throughout the research process by comparing insights derived from the primary text with relevant scholarly literature. This methodological approach enabled the study to generate a comprehensive, contextually grounded interpretation of KH. Zaini Mun'im's

character education framework and its relevance to contemporary educational challenges.

Trustworthiness and Validation

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source triangulation and interpretative validation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing interpretations derived from the primary text with evidence obtained from secondary scholarly literature. Interpretative validation was strengthened through iterative reading, thematic consistency checks, and continuous comparison between classical Islamic educational thought and contemporary academic discussions.

The credibility of the findings was ensured through prolonged engagement with the primary text and relevant literature. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of analytical procedures, while confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and scholarly sources. These strategies ensured that the resulting framework was analytically rigorous, theoretically coherent, and contextually relevant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

KH. Zaini Mun'im's Biography

KH. Zaini Mun'im (1928–1989) was a prominent *pesantren* scholar from Probolinggo, East Java, whose intellectual formation was deeply rooted in traditional Islamic education (Maulana & Khaer, 2026). Raised in a religious family, he studied classical Islamic sciences under leading *kiai* in East Java, developing expertise in *fiqh*, *tauhid*, and *tasawwuf*, while strengthening his commitment to *pesantren*-based education as a foundation for intellectual and moral development (Fawaid, 2019; Yakin et al., 2021).

His most influential contribution to Islamic education was the establishment of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School in Paiton, where he promoted an educational model integrating religious knowledge and character formation. For KH. Zaini Mun'im, education was not merely the transmission of knowledge but a process of cultivating *akhlaq* and moral responsibility (Fawaid, 2019; Suib, 2018).

Among his intellectual works, *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* occupies a central position. Written in poetic (*nadhom*) form, the text summarizes the branches of faith in a pedagogically accessible manner while preserving theological depth (Zaini, 2012). Widely studied in *pesantren* environments, it functions as a medium for internalizing ethical values and transforming abstract theological concepts into practical guidance for daily life (Mun'im & Fadhila, 2021). Through this work, KH. Zaini Mun'im challenged the dichotomy between knowledge and morality by embedding ethical values within curriculum, institutional culture, and everyday educational practices (Pathollah et al., 2024). Although he passed away in 1989, his ideas continue to influence contemporary discussions on value-based Islamic education in Indonesia (Yakin et al., 2021).

Husnul Khuluq as the Core of Faith-Based Character Education

The analysis reveals that *Husnul Khuluq* occupies a central position in KH. Zaini Mun'im's interpretation of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*. Rather than functioning as a supplementary ethical attribute, it serves as the integrative core connecting *iman*, *qaul*, and *'amal*. Within the classical framework of *Syu'abul Iman*, moral conduct is not external to faith but constitutes one of its essential manifestations (Zaini, 2012).

This perspective is reflected in the following verse:

وَحُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ مِنْ شُعَبِ الْإِيمَانِ

بِهِ يَسْمُو الْفَتَى فِي كُلِّ زَمَانِ

The phrase *min shu'ab al-iman* indicates that good character forms an integral part of faith. Meanwhile, the verb *yasmū* (to rise or elevate) emphasizes moral development as a continuous process rather than a fixed condition. Thus, KH. Zaini Mun'im frames morality as a transformative process through which faith becomes visible in social life (Maulana & Khaer, 2026; Zaini, 2012).

The placement of *Husnul Khuluq* near the culmination of the branches of faith further highlights its significance. It suggests that faith reaches maturity only when expressed through ethical conduct. Consequently, *husnul khuluq* functions as both the outcome and the indicator of authentic faith (Fawaid, 2019). This perspective challenges contemporary tendencies to separate religious observance from ethical responsibility, in KH. Zaini Mun'im's framework, faith is validated not only through belief and ritual but also through moral consequences.

The poetic structure of the *nadhom* strengthens this educational function. Its rhythm and mnemonic form facilitate both memorization and internalization, allowing ethical principles to be understood cognitively and absorbed affectively. As a result, *Husnul Khuluq* emerges as the apex of character education within the framework of *Syu'abul Iman*.

Moral Communication and Social Ethics in Nadhom Syu'abul Iman

The findings further indicate that KH. Zaini Mun'im extends character education beyond personal morality toward social interaction, particularly through ethical communication. Speech is presented as a moral expression of faith and a reflection of individual character.

This principle is articulated in the following verse:

وَحِفْظُ اللِّسَانِ عَنْ كُلِّ قَبِيحٍ

دَلِيلُ إِيمَانٍ صَحِيحٍ صَرِيحٍ

The concept of *hifz al-lisan* emphasizes active self-restraint rather than passive silence. Likewise, the terms *sahih* and *sarih* suggest that ethical communication must be both internally sincere and externally responsible. Communication is therefore understood as an ethical practice that reflects the integrity of faith (Huda et al., 2024; Suib, 2018).

This perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary digital environments, where anonymity and technological mediation often weaken ethical

accountability within KH. Zaini Mun'im's framework holds that harmful speech, gossip, slander, and verbal aggression are not merely social violations but manifestations of deficiencies in faith itself. Ethical communication thus becomes a mechanism through which faith is expressed and evaluated.

The analysis also shows that *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* links speech ethics with broader social values such as respect, empathy, and communal harmony. Ethical communication is not limited to avoiding harm; it also includes actively promoting human dignity and mutual recognition. This resonates with the Qur'anic principles of *qaulan ma'rufa* and *qaulan layyina*, which KH. Zaini Mun'im translates into a pedagogically accessible form (Nurhikmah, 2024; Zaini, 2012).

Consequently, communication functions as a bridge between theology and social ethics. Character education is therefore extended beyond formal educational settings and embedded within everyday social interactions.

Habituation and Exemplary Conduct in Pesantren-Based Education

The findings demonstrate that KH. Zaini Mun'im's educational philosophy is closely connected to the *pesantren* tradition, where character formation is achieved through habituation (*ta'wid*) and exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*). Unlike many modern educational systems that prioritize cognitive achievement, *pesantren* education emphasizes the continuous practice of ethical values.

This approach is reflected in the following verse:

وَبِالتَّعْوِيدِ تَثْبُتُ الْأَخْلَاقُ

كَالْعِلْمِ يَرْسَخُ فِي الْأَعْمَاقِ

The verse illustrates that character, like knowledge, develops through repetition and reinforcement. The verb *yarsakh* (to become firmly rooted) suggests that moral qualities are cultivated gradually through sustained practice rather than acquired instantaneously. Character education therefore requires a continuous process of moral habituation (Zaini, 2012).

The role of the *kyai* is particularly significant within this framework. Moral instruction is not confined to textual teaching but is embodied through everyday behavior and interpersonal interaction. Students learn ethical values not only through formal lessons but also through observation and participation in communal life (Eka & Pandin, 2021).

Importantly, habituation in *pesantren* is reflective rather than mechanical. Repetition is accompanied by guidance, correction, and moral reasoning, ensuring that ethical practices are internalized meaningfully rather than performed superficially (Ismail et al., 2020; Maulana & Khaer, 2026). This process transforms external discipline into internal conviction.

The findings further suggest that while educational contexts may change, the principle of habituation remains essential for character formation. The *pesantren* model demonstrates that character education develops through sustained moral environments rather than isolated interventions (Arif et al., 2024). This ecological dimension explains the enduring relevance of KH. Zaini Mun'im's educational thought.

Recontextualizing KH. Zaini Mun'im's Thought for Millennial Digital Ethics

The relevance of KH. Zaini Mun'im's framework becomes increasingly evident when examined within the context of contemporary digital culture. Challenges such as cyberbullying, misinformation, hate speech, and performative religiosity require ethical frameworks that extend beyond conventional normative instruction.

The findings indicate that the hermeneutic potential of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* lies in its capacity to translate classical ethical principles into contemporary contexts. For example, the injunction to guard one's tongue (*hifz al-lisan*) can be reinterpreted as an obligation to regulate digital communication. In online environments, the "tongue" is effectively replaced by keyboards, screens, and digital platforms. Consequently, ethical restraint must also govern virtual interactions.

Similarly, the emphasis on *husnul khuluq* as the culmination of faith challenges the performative culture of social media, where religious identity is often displayed symbolically without corresponding ethical behavior. KH. Zaini Mun'im's framework redirects attention toward ethical substance rather than symbolic representation (Zaini, 2012).

The findings also reveal that the *pesantren* model of habituation offers important insights for digital literacy education. Ethical behavior should not be taught merely as a set of rules but cultivated through repeated practice and moral reflection in everyday digital activities (Latuheru et al., 2024; Wolor, 2021).

Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that recontextualization requires critical interpretation rather than direct application. Contemporary digital environments involve complexities such as algorithmic amplification, virtual anonymity, and information overload that were absent from classical contexts. Therefore, KH. Zaini Mun'im's ideas must be interpreted through a hermeneutic lens that preserves their ethical essence while adapting them to contemporary realities.

These findings demonstrate that *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* provides a valuable conceptual framework for bridging classical Islamic ethics and contemporary moral challenges. Its principles remain relevant not because they offer direct solutions to modern problems, but because they provide enduring ethical foundations that can guide moral conduct in changing social contexts.

Table 2. Primary Text Analysis of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*

No	Text (Arabic)	Branch of Faith	Position	Key Concept	Analytical Interpretation
1	وَحُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ مِنْ شُعَبِ الْإِيمَانِ	Moral Conduct	66th	Husnul Khuluq	Culmination of faith; ethical embodiment
2	وَحِفْظُ اللِّسَانِ عَنْ كُلِّ قَبِيحٍ	Speech Ethics	Mid-level	Moral Communication	Speech as indicator of faith integrity
3	وَبِالتَّعْوِيدِ تَثْبُتُ الْأَخْلَاقُ	Habituation	Pedagogical	Character Formation	Repetition leads to internalization
4	إِيمَانٌ بِقَلْبٍ وَقَوْلٌ وَعَمَلٌ	Faith Structure	Foundational	Integration	Unity of belief, speech, action

The findings presented in Table 2 demonstrate that *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* is not merely a collection of moral teachings but a coherent ethical framework

integrating faith, communication, habituation, and character formation. The text systematically connects theological principles to practical moral conduct, illustrating how faith translates into everyday behavior. Four central themes emerge from the analysis: *husnul khuluq* as the culmination of faith, ethical communication as a manifestation of belief, habituation as the mechanism of character formation, and the integration of belief, speech, and action as the foundation of moral development.

Nadhom Syu'abul Iman as the Primary Source of Character Education

The findings indicate that *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* provides a structured theological and ethical foundation for character education rather than merely offering a collection of moral prescriptions (Maulana & Khaer, 2026; Zaini, 2012). Drawing upon the prophetic tradition that faith consists of numerous branches, KH. Zaini Mun'im reconstructs the concept pedagogically through poetic form, transforming abstract theological principles into practical moral guidance.

The text organizes faith as an interconnected system of values encompassing spiritual conviction, verbal expression, and ethical action. In this framework, faith is not understood as a purely internal belief but as a multidimensional construct manifested through observable behavior. Consequently, character formation becomes inseparable from faith formation.

This integration is reflected in the following verse:

إِيمَانٌ بِقَلْبٍ وَقَوْلٌ بِاللِّسَانِ
وَعَمَلٌ بِالأَرْكَانِ فِي كُلِّ زَمَانِ

The verse illustrates the unity of *al-qalb* (inner conviction), *al-lisan* (verbal expression), and *al-jawarih* (embodied action). Rather than functioning as separate dimensions, these elements form an integrated structure in which faith is validated through speech and action. The repeated conjunction *wa* emphasizes interdependence, suggesting that authentic faith requires the simultaneous presence of belief, expression, and practice (Zaini, 2012).

Within this structure, *Husnul Khuluq* occupies a particularly significant position. The findings identify it as one of the culminating branches of faith, indicating that moral excellence represents the mature expression of religious commitment. This is reflected in the following verse:

وَحُسْنُ الْخُلُقِ مِنْ شُعَبِ الْإِيمَانِ
بِهِ يَكْمُلُ الْمَرْءُ فِي الْإِحْسَانِ

The phrase *bihi yakmulu* ("through it one is perfected") positions *husnul khuluq* as the culmination of faith rather than merely one virtue among many. Ethical conduct becomes the visible manifestation of an otherwise invisible faith. Accordingly, moral maturity is achieved when belief is translated into socially meaningful virtues (Ismail et al., 2020; Yakin et al., 2021).

The findings further reveal that moral behavior in KH. Zaini Mun'im's framework originates from *ta'alluq billah*—a conscious relationship with God.

However, this vertical orientation does not diminish social responsibility. Instead, it reinforces ethical accountability by linking human actions to both divine and social consequences. Character education is therefore grounded simultaneously in theological legitimacy and social praxis.

This relationship is particularly evident in the treatment of speech ethics:

وَحِفْظُ اللِّسَانِ عَنْ كُلِّ قَبِيحٍ
شَرْطٌ لِإِيمَانٍ صَحِيحٍ صَرِيحٍ

The term *shart* (condition) indicates that ethical communication is not an optional virtue but a requirement of authentic faith. Harmful speech is therefore understood not only as a social problem but also as a theological concern. This interpretation reinforces the reciprocal relationship between belief, speech, and action within the broader structure of *Syu'abul Iman* (Chan & Lee, 2023; Suib, 2018).

Another important finding concerns the pedagogical function of the *nadhom* form itself. The rhythmic and mnemonic structure facilitates memorization, repetition, and internalization, enabling ethical values to become embedded within learners' cognitive and affective dimensions (Huda et al., 2024; Maulana & Khaer, 2026). Character development is thus understood as a cumulative and habitual process rather than a temporary behavioral intervention.

Nevertheless, the analysis also identifies certain limitations. Although the ethical structure of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* remains highly coherent, contemporary challenges such as digital communication, algorithmic influence, and virtual interaction are not explicitly addressed in the text. Consequently, its application in modern contexts requires hermeneutic reinterpretation rather than direct transfer.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* offers a comprehensive moral ontology in which *iman*, *qaul*, and *'amal* function as an integrated framework for character formation. Within this structure, *husnul khuluq* emerges as the highest manifestation of faith and serves as the central objective of character education.

Discussion

This study repositions KH. Zaini Mun'im's thought within contemporary character education discourse by demonstrating that the integration of ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions is not merely a response to contemporary moral challenges but a continuation of a well-established epistemological tradition in *pesantren* education. While recent studies emphasize the urgency of integrating values to address moral disruptions associated with technological change (Jakandar et al., 2025), the findings indicate that *pesantren*-based character education already embodies a coherent and value-centered framework. This suggests that Islamic character education should be understood not as a reactive model but as a resilient paradigm capable of addressing changing moral contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, the proposed model of faith-based transformative character education contributes to the literature by explaining how character is formed through the integration of *iman*, *qaul*, and *'amal*. Unlike contemporary frameworks that primarily conceptualize moral development

through cognitive, behavioral, or socio-emotional dimensions (Chowdhury, 2016; Gandotra et al., 2023; Pérez & Bahamon Muneton, 2023), the findings demonstrate that transcendental accountability fundamentally shapes moral motivation. Ethical behavior is therefore driven not only by social expectations or psychological regulation but also by an internalized sense of responsibility before God. This provides a stronger explanatory basis for moral consistency and addresses a limitation often identified in secular approaches to character education.

The findings further reveal that KH. Zaini Mun'im's framework is both continuous with and adaptive to classical Islamic educational thought. Al-Ghazali's concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* emphasizes spiritual purification as the basis of moral development (Fajri & Mukaroma, 2021; Nurhikmah, 2024), whereas KH. Zaini Mun'im extends this internal process into a socially operational model through ethical communication, habituation, and communal responsibility. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun's notion of habituation (*'adah*) (Ismail et al., 2020) is reconstructed by linking repetitive moral practice to divine accountability, thereby transforming habit into conscious ethical commitment. In addition, Az-Zarnuji's emphasis on ethical learning relationships (Huda et al., 2024) is expanded beyond teacher–student interactions to encompass broader social engagement. These findings suggest the originality of KH. Zaini Mun'im's thought lies not in rejecting classical traditions but in reconstructing them into an integrative framework that remains relevant to contemporary educational realities.

A major contribution of this study is the extension of classical Islamic ethics into the domain of digital moral responsibility. Although classical scholars did not explicitly address digital environments, the findings demonstrate that foundational ethical principles remain applicable through contextual reinterpretation. Issues such as online anonymity, cyberbullying, misinformation, and communication ethics can be addressed through concepts embedded within *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* (Eka & Pandin, 2021; Nasar et al., 2024). This indicates that faith-based ethics possesses conceptual flexibility, enabling it to remain relevant in technologically mediated environments. Consequently, *Syu'abul Iman* may be understood as a transhistorical ethical framework capable of guiding moral behavior across changing social contexts.

The findings also strengthen existing arguments regarding praxis-oriented character education. Previous studies have emphasized teacher modeling, experiential learning, and moral habituation as key components of character formation (Azmiyah & Astutik, 2021; Latuheru et al., 2024). However, this study demonstrates that within the Islamic educational tradition, the relationship between *'ilm* and *'amal* is not merely pedagogical but ontological. Character is not simply taught; it must be embodied. This shifts the discussion from questions of instructional strategy toward a deeper understanding of why ethical behavior constitutes an essential manifestation of faith.

Another important finding concerns the educational function of *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*. The analysis shows that the text operates not only as a medium for transmitting values but also as a framework for ethical reasoning (Jariah et al., 2024). Through its structured presentation of the branches of faith, the *nadhom* encourages learners to connect theological principles with everyday moral decisions. This finding aligns with contemporary perspectives that view character

education as involving both moral knowledge and moral reasoning (Baker, 2025). More broadly, it demonstrates that traditional Islamic texts can contribute meaningfully to global educational discourse when interpreted through analytical and contextual approaches.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational institutions should move beyond fragmented approaches to character education (Eka & Pandin, 2021). Effective character formation requires integrating spiritual values, ethical reflection, and real-world moral challenges, particularly in digital environments. The findings also highlight the importance of teachers as moral exemplars, reinforcing the need for professional development programs that cultivate ethical and spiritual competencies alongside pedagogical skills (Biantoro, 2019; Ismail et al., 2020). Furthermore, institutionalizing habituation-based practices within school culture can ensure that character education becomes a lived experience rather than merely a curricular objective.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. As a qualitative library research project, it focuses on conceptual reconstruction and textual interpretation, rather than empirically testing the proposed framework. Consequently, the model's effectiveness in educational settings remains to be verified. Future studies should employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches to examine the implementation and impact of *Syu'abul Iman*-based character education in contemporary schools and *pesantren* (Busetto et al., 2020; Donkoh, 2023). Comparative studies with other Islamic scholars would also help refine and expand the theoretical framework.

Overall, this study advances character education theory by proposing a faith-based framework that integrates transcendental, behavioral, social, and digital dimensions. Its primary contribution lies in demonstrating that KH. Zaini Mun'im's educational thought is not only historically rooted but also theoretically robust and adaptable to contemporary challenges. By connecting classical Islamic ethics with present-day educational concerns, the study offers a meaningful alternative framework for character education. It enriches ongoing discussions on moral development in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Husnul Khuluq* occupies a central position in KH. Zaini Mun'im's concept of character education as articulated in *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman*. Character is understood not merely as behavioral compliance but as the manifestation of faith through moral conduct, empathy, self-control, and social responsibility. The findings reveal that *iman*, *qaul*, and *'amal* form an integrated framework in which ethical behavior becomes the visible expression of religious consciousness. Consequently, character education is grounded in both spiritual commitment and social engagement.

The study further shows that *Nadhom Syu'abul Iman* remains relevant for addressing contemporary moral challenges, particularly those associated with digital communication, declining social empathy, and ethical disorientation among the millennial generation. Through contextual reinterpretation, its ethical principles provide a framework for promoting responsible communication, moral self-

restraint, and constructive social interaction in both offline and online environments.

The originality of this study lies in its reconstruction of KH. Zaini Mun'im's educational thought into a faith-based, transformative character education model that integrates theological foundations, ethical practice, and contemporary digital challenges. This study contributes to Islamic character education theory by demonstrating that classical *pesantren* scholarship offers a conceptually robust and adaptable framework for contemporary moral development.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational institutions, particularly *pesantren* and faith-based schools, should strengthen the integration of spiritual values, ethical habituation, and teacher role modeling within their educational practices. Character education should also be continuously contextualized to respond to emerging social and technological developments.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on qualitative library research and conceptual analysis. The proposed framework has not yet been empirically tested in educational settings. Therefore, future research should investigate its implementation through field-based studies, including classroom observations, curriculum analysis, and interviews with educators and students. Such studies are necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of *Syu'abul Iman*-based character education and to develop its application in contemporary educational contexts further.

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