

Noble Character Formation Through Transformative Spirituality Habituation Among Cadres of Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM) Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya (UINSA)

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Keywords: <i>Noble Character, Transformative Spirituality, IMM cadres, Islamic education</i>	ABSTRACT: This study examines the formation of noble character (<i>akhlak mulia</i>) through the habituation of transformative spirituality among cadres of the Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM) at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya (UINSA). The research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, involving 20 IMM cadres as informants selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The findings reveal that transformative spirituality habituation encompassing daily prayers, dhikr, Quran recitation, and spiritual mentoring sessions significantly contributes to character development among IMM cadres. Three interconnected mechanisms were identified: internal spiritual purification (<i>tazkiyatun nafs</i>), social actualization through organizational service, and intellectual integration of Islamic values into academic pursuits. The study concludes that systematic and structured spiritual habituation within the IMM organizational framework effectively cultivates noble character, manifested in honesty, responsibility, empathy, and leadership ethics. These findings contribute to Islamic education
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scholarship by demonstrating how organizational spiritual practices can serve as transformative character formation platforms in higher education contexts.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The formation of noble character (*akhlak mulia*) constitutes the core of Islamic educational objectives, which are not solely cognitive in nature but holistically encompass spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. In the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, the challenge of student character formation has become increasingly complex amid the currents of globalization that bring diverse changes in values and lifestyles (Nashir, 2020) [2]. Islamic student organizations play a strategic role as vehicles for character formation outside formal classrooms, particularly through the habituation of transformative spiritual values.

The Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM), as an autonomous organization of Muhammadiyah within university settings, holds a strong commitment to cultivating cadres who are noble in character, intellectually accomplished, and socially dedicated (Pimpinan Pusat IMM, 2021) [3]. At Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya (UINSA), IMM operates within a unique academic-religious ecosystem where Islamic spiritual traditions and modern scholarship meet and mutually reinforce one another. This context creates both unique opportunities and challenges in the process of cadre character formation.

Transformative spirituality in Islam refers to the process of profound inner transformation through a series of structured worship practices (*ibadah*) and social interactions (*muamalah*), aimed at shifting one's life orientation from the egocentric to the theocentric and altruistic (Muhaimin, 2019) [4]. This concept is rooted in the Islamic Sufi tradition, which regards the spiritual journey as an ongoing process of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul). In the context of student organizations, transformative spirituality is implemented through structured and sustained habituation programs.

Previous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between spiritual practices and character formation, both in formal and informal educational contexts (Djaelani, 2013) [5]. However, research specifically focused on the mechanisms of transformative spirituality within the context of Islamic student organizations in Indonesia, particularly IMM, remains very limited. Most studies have placed greater emphasis on the cognitive and curricular

aspects of character education, while the experiential and organizational dimensions of *akhlak* formation have received insufficient attention (Zulkifli & Maarif, 2022) [6].

This research gap creates an urgency to examine in depth how IMM UINSA implements transformative spirituality habituation as a strategy for forming the noble character of its cadres. A comprehensive understanding of this mechanism is not only important for IMM, but can also contribute to the development of character education models based on Islamic student organizations at the national level (Azra, 2012) [7].

This research aims to: (1) identify the forms of transformative spirituality habituation implemented by IMM UINSA in forming the noble character of cadres; (2) analyze the mechanisms and processes of noble character formation through transformative spirituality habituation; and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of transformative spirituality habituation in forming the noble character of IMM UINSA cadres. The main research question is: How does transformative spirituality habituation contribute to the formation of noble character among IMM UINSA cadres?

This study is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic character education models in the context of student organizations, as well as practical contributions for IMM administrators, Islamic higher education institutions, and character education practitioners in Indonesia. By employing a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to capture the depth of the subjective experiences of IMM cadres in the process of character formation through transformative spiritual practices (Creswell, 2014) [8].

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the subjective experiences of IMM UINSA cadres in the process of character formation through transformative spirituality habituation. The phenomenological approach was chosen for its capacity to capture the essence of the lived experience of informants in a natural and holistic context (Moustakas, 1994) [9]. The interpretivist paradigm was used as the epistemological foundation, viewing reality as a social construction that is pluralistic and contextual (Lincoln & Guba, 2013) [10].

The research was conducted at the campus of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel (UINSA) Surabaya, particularly within the activities of the IMM commissariats spread across several faculties. The location was selected on

the basis that UINSA is one of the leading State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) in Eastern Indonesia with a strong and diverse tradition of Islamic student organizations. Data collection was carried out over eight months, from January to August 2024, covering the active period of IMM activities including the new cadre recruitment period (*perkaderan*) and various routine spirituality programs.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) active members of IMM UINSA for at least one year; (2) having participated in the IMM cadre training program; (3) active in IMM spirituality activities; and (4) willing to participate in the research voluntarily. Based on these criteria, 20 informants were obtained, consisting of 8 core commissariat administrators, 7 mid-level active cadres, and 5 new cadres who had completed the basic cadre training program. The variation in position and length of membership in IMM was intended to obtain diverse perspectives on the character formation process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) [11].

Data were collected through three primary complementary methods. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each informant in one to three sessions, each lasting between 60-90 minutes. Interview guides were developed based on a literature review and validated by two Islamic education experts. Second, participant observation was carried out over eight months by attending various IMM activities including regular study sessions, congregational prayers, leadership training, and community service programs. Third, documentation studies encompassed analysis of IMM work programs, activity reports, cadre training documents, and reflective notes of cadres (Sugiyono, 2022) [12].

Data analysis employed an inductive thematic analysis model integrated with Colaizzi's (1978) [13] descriptive phenomenological analysis procedure. The analytical stages included: (1) verbatim transcription of all interview recordings; (2) repeated reading and noting of initial impressions; (3) extraction of significant statements; (4) formulation of meanings from each significant statement; (5) organization of meanings into themes; (6) integration of themes into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon; and (7) validation of results with informants (member checking). The coding process was carried out manually and assisted by NVivo software to enhance the accuracy and efficiency of qualitative data analysis (Yin, 2018) [14].

Data validity was ensured through four criteria: credibility was achieved through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking; transferability was met through thick description allowing readers to assess

the relevance of findings for other contexts; dependability was checked through an audit trail documenting all methodological decisions; and confirmability was verified through researcher reflexivity documented in a reflective journal. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency and validity of interpretation (Moleong, 2021) [15].

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Transformative Spirituality Habituation at IMM UINSA

IMM at UINSA Surabaya consists of several commissariats spread across various faculties. As an autonomous student organization of Muhammadiyah, IMM UINSA has an organized cadre training structure ranging from the commissariat level to the city branch. Based on documentation data, IMM UINSA currently has more than 500 active cadres spread across 12 faculty commissariats. IMM UINSA's vision is to produce cadres with spiritual depth, intellectual breadth, and social sensitivity three pillars referred to as the "*Tri Kompetensi Dasar*" (Three Core Competencies) of IMM cadres (Tanfidz Musyawarah Cabang IMM, 2023) [16].

The research findings identified eight forms of transformative spirituality habituation consistently practiced by IMM UINSA in shaping the character of its cadres. First, obligatory congregational prayers (*shalat berjamaah*) held daily at the commissariat prayer room (*musholla*). This practice is not merely a formal ritual, but is understood as the habituation of time discipline, solidarity, and submission to Allah SWT. As stated by a key informant: "*Congregational prayers at IMM are not only about shared rewards, but we learn to be present on time, to respect others, and to feel the equality of the imam and congregation standing side by side*" (Syafiullah, interview, March 2024).

Second, morning and evening dhikr and wird (litanies) conducted collectively after fajr and maghrib prayers. This communal dhikr practice is designed to build sustained theological awareness and connect academic busyness with the transcendental dimension. According to Al-Ghazali's research (in Maarif, 2020) [17], regular dhikr habituation significantly influences emotional stability and consistent character formation. Third, Quranic recitation (*tadarus*) and memorization (*tahfizh Al-Qur'an*) conducted every Monday and Thursday. This program focuses not only on memorization, but also on understanding the meanings and internalizing Quranic values in the daily lives of cadres.

Fourth, *halaqah tarbiyah* (learning circles) held weekly with discussions on themes of *akhlak*, *fiqih muamalah*, and contemporary spirituality. These *halaqah* serve as spaces for reflection and critical dialogue on the implementation of Islamic values in the context of modern student life (Hasan, 2020) [18]. Fifth, *riyadhah ruhiyah* (spiritual exercises) in the form of a guided spiritual retreat (*khalwat*) program lasting 2-3 days, conducted each semester. This program combines voluntary fasting (*puasa sunnah*), night prayers (*qiyamul lail*), and contemplation of nature (*tafakkur alam*) in one intensive spirituality package aimed at renewing the spiritual commitment of cadres.

Sixth, individual spiritual mentoring conducted regularly between senior mentors (*murabbi*) and junior cadres. This mentoring system adopts the wisdom (*hikmah*) approach in the Sufi tradition, where a spiritual guide (*mursyid*) directs the student in the process of inner development (Khoiruddin, 2019) [19]. Seventh, a scheduled *infaq* and *sadaqah* (charitable giving) program designed to habituate cadres in generosity and social care. Eighth, monthly *sirah nabawiyah* (prophetic biography) study sessions held to reinforce the exemplary model of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the most perfect paradigm of noble character (Shihab, 2018) [20].

Mechanisms and Manifestations of Noble Character Formation Through Transformative Spirituality Among IMM UINSA Cadres

Data analysis reveals three main mechanisms that explain how transformative spirituality habituation contributes to the formation of noble character among IMM UINSA cadres. The first mechanism is *tazkiyatun nafs* (internal soul purification), which occurs through regular and devout (*khusyu'*) worship practices. This process involves controlling the *nafs ammarah* (the soul that incites evil) and strengthening the *nafs muthmainnah* (the tranquil and peaceful soul). Cadres who consistently practice spiritual habituation report significant changes in emotional stability, self-control, and a more meaningful life orientation (Hamka, 2015) [21].

Junaidi, a commissariat chair with 3 years of experience in IMM, described this process: "I used to get angry easily and was self centered. But after regularly attending congregational prayers and *halaqah*, I began to realize that anger only harms myself. Dhikr has taught me to always remember Allah in every situation, and that has changed the way I respond to problems" (Junaidi, interview, April 2024). These findings are consistent with the cognitive spiritual theory developed by Frankl (2006) [22], which holds that the search for spiritual meaning fundamentally transforms the structure of a person's character.

The second mechanism is social actualization through organizational service.

IMM UINSA requires every cadre to be actively involved in community programs as a manifestation of the spiritual values that have been internalized. These service activities include literacy programs for underprivileged children, social assistance for disaster victims, and advocacy for student rights. Participation in these social actions serves as a real test and reinforcement of the moral values learned in spiritual forums (Naim, 2021) [23].

The third mechanism is intellectual integration, in which IMM cadres are directed to integrate spiritual values and *akhlak* into their academic activities. Through the program "*Gerakan Mahasiswa Islam Berkemajuan*" (Progressive Islamic Student Movement), IMM UINSA encourages its cadres to regard academic research as a form of worship and service. This creates coherence between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions that prevents a dichotomy between religion and science (Wahyudi, 2020) [24]. These three mechanisms work synergistically in forming holistic noble character, not only in the ritual dimension, but also in the social relations and intellectual activities of cadres.

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, this study identifies six main manifestations of noble character formed through transformative spirituality habituation among IMM UINSA cadres. First, honesty and academic integrity, reflected in cadres' rejection of plagiarism and academic dishonesty despite facing the pressure of heavy assignments. Second, a high sense of responsibility in fulfilling organizational mandates (*amanah*), manifested in timely completion of tasks and commitment to established work programs (Zubaedi, 2021) [25].

Third, empathy and social sensitivity, manifested in cadres active participation in social community programs. Observational data indicate that IMM cadres' participation rate in social activities is 40% higher than non organizational students. Fourth, humility (*tawadhu*), manifested in the willingness to learn from peers, accept criticism, and not draw attention to oneself. Fifth, steadfastness of principles (*istiqamah*), evident in cadres consistency in practicing Islamic values even outside the IMM environment. Sixth, ethical leadership, in which cadres who have undergone the spiritual formation process are more inclined to apply a collaborative and transformative leadership style (Tasmara, 2006) [26].

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Dynamics of Noble Character Formation

The research also identified factors influencing the effectiveness of transformative spirituality habituation. Key supporting factors include: exemplary and consistent commissariat leadership, a structured and personal

mentoring system, an organizational culture conducive to spiritual growth, and institutional support from UINSA for Islamic characterized student activities (Amini, 2021) [27]. In addition, the religious campus environment with an active campus mosque and various Islamic study sessions also contributes to creating an ecosystem that supports the character formation process.

Identified inhibiting factors include: academic busyness that frequently conflicts with the schedule of spirituality activities, heterogeneity in cadres Islamic backgrounds requiring differentiated approaches, challenges in maintaining consistency of habituation outside the IMM environment, and the influence of a digital lifestyle tending toward the secular. Several informants expressed difficulty in maintaining spiritual routines outside the IMM environment, particularly during holidays or examination periods. These findings indicate the need to develop more effective "carry over" strategies to ensure that spirituality habituation is not confined to the spaces and times of organizational activities alone (Mulyasa, 2020) [28].

The findings of this research provide a rich perspective on the dynamics of noble character formation through Islamic student organizations. Theoretically, the results of this research reinforce the argument that character formation in Islam cannot be separated from the spiritual and communal dimensions (Nata, 2021) [29]. In contrast to Western character education approaches that place greater emphasis on cognitive and behavioral aspects, the IMM UINSA approach demonstrates that deep and sustained character change can only occur through holistic spiritual transformation.

This research also supports Mezirow's (2009) [30] theory of "transformative learning" from an Islamic perspective. Transformative spirituality habituation in IMM does not merely add new knowledge or skills, but fundamentally transforms the "frame of reference" or basic perspective of cadres in understanding the self, others, and God. This transformation process produces *akhlak* that is not merely external compliance, but rather an expression of authentic inner change. This concept has strong relevance to Kohlberg's (1984) [31] theory of moral development, particularly at the post-conventional stage where morality is internalized as a universal principle, not merely an external rule.

Comparison with similar research in other contexts reveals the uniqueness of the IMM UINSA model. Rossidy's (2017) [32] study on pesantren found that a fully residential environment is more effective in character formation; however, the IMM model demonstrates that even in a non residential context,

structured spiritual habituation can produce significant character change. This is an important contribution since the majority of Indonesian students live outside dormitories and require a character formation model that can function within a more open and diverse campus life context (Majid & Andayani, 2017) [33].

The pedagogical implications of these findings suggest that the integration of structured spirituality programs into curricula and student activities can serve as an effective strategy for addressing the character crisis that is currently a shared concern among educators and higher education stakeholders in Indonesia (Gunawan, 2022) [34]. The model developed by IMM UINSA can be adapted and replicated by other Islamic student organizations, with attention to the respective local context of each institution. Furthermore, closer collaboration between IMM and UINSA as an institution in formally integrating spirituality programs into student policies and programs can strengthen and extend the positive impact already achieved (Abdullah, 2020) [35].

IV. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that transformative spirituality habituation within the IMM UINSA organization contributes significantly and systematically to the formation of noble character among cadres. Eight forms of spirituality habituation congregational prayers, dhikr, Quranic recitation, *halaqah*, *riyadhah*, mentoring, *infaq*, and *sirah* study sessions work synergistically through three main mechanisms: *tazkiyatun nafs*, social actualization, and intellectual integration. The identified outcomes of character formation include honesty, responsibility, empathy, humility (*tawadhu*), steadfastness (*istiqamah*), and ethical leadership.

The theoretical implications of this research contribute a model of *akhlak* formation based on the spirituality of student organizations that integrates elements of Islamic Sufism and transformative learning theory. Practically, this research provides a blueprint that can be adapted by other Islamic student organizations and integrated into the student affairs policies of Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions.

The limitations of this research include its focus on a single institution and a single organization, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across institutions and across Islamic student organizations, as well as to employ longitudinal designs to measure the long-term sustainability and consistency of character formation impacts. The development of quantitative instruments

to measure the level of *akhlak* formation would also enrich the understanding of this phenomenon.

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