

## INTEGRATING ETHICAL COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION LITERACY IN AQIDAH-AKHLAQ LEARNING: A STRATEGY FOR ISLAMIC CHARACTER FORMATION AT DARUL QUR'AN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the integration of ethical communication values into the Aqidah-Akhlaq curriculum to foster Islamic character development among students at MTs Darul Qur'an, an Islamic boarding school in Medan, Indonesia. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research explores students' daily communication behaviors, the pedagogical roles of teachers and guardians, and the strategic incorporation of information literacy. Findings reveal a significant gap between moral instruction and students' interpersonal conduct, often manifested through disrespectful interactions and communication breakdowns. However, when Aqidah-Akhlaq is delivered through dialogical, participatory methods, and supported by role modeling, students exhibit increased ethical awareness and engagement. The study emphasizes that information literacy must be repositioned as a core moral and pedagogical framework rather than a supplementary skill. It concludes with a call for institutional reform and teacher capacity building to embed communication ethics within Islamic education.*

**Keywords:** *Ethical communication, Aqidah-Akhlaq, Islamic education, Information literacy, Pesantren pedagogy*

### INTRODUCTION

Communication serves as a fundamental aspect of human social life, enabling individuals to establish relationships both on a personal and communal level. In everyday interactions, communication functions not merely as a channel for transmitting information, but also as a medium for shaping mutual understanding and fostering meaningful social engagement. Through communication, individuals exchange ideas, express emotions, and build trust and collaboration. Hence, the ability to communicate effectively and ethically is crucial in establishing harmonious and productive social relationships (Kholil et al., 2024; Humaizi et al., 2024).

This perspective is reinforced by Dalimunthe et al. (2024) and Sikumbang et al (2024), who argue that communication plays a foundational role in shaping human interactions across various domains of life. Similarly, Dalimunthe et al (2024) and Ohorella et al (2024) emphasize

that communication is a pillar of social cohesion and cultural continuity. However, communication is not a neutral or value-free act; it must adhere to ethical guidelines that maintain clarity, reduce potential noise, and preserve the intended meaning of the message. As Johannesenl (2008) points out, effective communication is not only about content delivery but also about ensuring its impact, with minimal distortion or misunderstanding.

Given the centrality of communication in social processes, this study focuses on the educational environment, particularly the school setting, where communication dynamics between teachers and students are critical. Prior studies reveal recurring problems in school-based communication, such as miscommunication between educators and students (Johnson, 2002; Kim et al., 2021), and students' lack of responsiveness to institutional communication norms (Owakah & Oswani, 2011; Razak, 2024). These issues not only disrupt instructional effectiveness but also weaken interpersonal bonds, potentially diminishing the overall learning climate.

Dalimunthe (2022) highlight how poor communication can decrease student motivation and lead to classroom conflict. Lubis & Fitri (2023) show that students' perception of fairness in teacher communication significantly influences their behavior and engagement. When students feel unheard or undervalued, they may express dissent through undisciplined behavior. Meanwhile, Purba & Anggorowati (2018) demonstrate that emotionally supportive communication fosters positive teacher-student relationships, which correlate with higher academic performance and classroom discipline. Roorda et al. (2011) caution that the absence of supportive communication can lead to alienation and hinder students' social-emotional development.

In this regard, building inclusive, empathetic, and ethical communication practices is essential in establishing a healthy school environment. Communication not only facilitates instruction but also plays a vital role in shaping the emotional, behavioral, and moral development of students. When ethical communication values are modeled and reinforced, schools become more humanistic, responsive, and transformative. Therefore, enhancing communication competence among educators and students alike is a strategic imperative in achieving quality education (Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

This study seeks to explore how the values of ethical communication can be integrated into the Aqidah-Akhlaq curriculum to shape Islamic character among students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Qur'an, an Islamic boarding school in Medan, Indonesia. In this context, the teaching of Aqidah-Akhlaq is not limited to religious content delivery but also serves as a platform for embedding core communication ethics, such as honesty, empathy, respect, and responsibility. Through contextual and interactive learning approaches, students are encouraged to embody these values in their daily interactions (Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

Teachers play a pivotal role as facilitators and role models in promoting ethical communication, ensuring that students not only understand the values in theory but also apply them in practice. The goal is to develop students into open-minded, communicative individuals capable of expressing themselves with dignity, engaging in collaborative dialogue, and cultivating a respectful learning atmosphere.

This aligns with Steen et al (2021), who advocate for moral education that fosters students' ability to think critically, communicate constructively, and uphold ethical interactions. Moral values instilled through education are essential not only for shaping personal integrity but also for strengthening social skills such as respectful expression and appreciation for diverse perspectives. Therefore, integrating ethical communication and Aqidah-Akhlaq learning

becomes foundational in nurturing a generation that is intellectually grounded and socially responsible (Indainanto et al., 2023).

This research is conducted at MTs Darul Qur'an, chosen due to observed communication issues between students and teachers. Initial observations revealed that some students tend to interrupt teachers during lessons or exhibit behavior contrary to school regulations—indicating a gap between the taught moral content and students' ethical communication practices. This communication gap poses challenges to the quality of learning and emotional connectedness within the school community (Sikumbang et al., 2024).

Thus, the research investigates how Aqidah-Akhlaq education can internalize ethical communication values in students' character formation. It aims to reconstruct a more responsive pedagogical approach that instills a positive communication culture, enhances interpersonal relationships, and creates a more inclusive and meaningful educational environment (Harianto et al., 2023).

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a deeper analysis of how values such as respectful dialogue, empathy, and honesty can be systematically incorporated into the teaching of Islamic moral education (Syam et al., 2024). Through a case study approach at MTs Darul Qur'an Medan, the study intends to offer a conceptual and practical contribution to Islamic character education, emphasizing the relevance of ethical communication in contemporary pedagogical frameworks.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand the phenomenon in the natural context of the conditions of students at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah Pondok Pesantren Darul Qur'an Medan in depth, where the researcher acts as the main instrument that conducts direct observation without manipulation of the research variables. This is in line with the view of Creswell (2014), which emphasizes that qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of meaning obtained from the subject's experience in their natural environment. This research was conducted at the Islamic Center Foundation General Besar Doktor Haji Abdul Haris Nasution, Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School Darul Qur'an located on Jalan Dusun I Pasar 1, Amplas Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique (Creswell, 2014) in determining informants, namely by selecting individuals who are considered the most relevant and able to provide in-depth information in accordance with the research objectives. In this case, the researcher sets certain criteria as a reference to determine who is worthy of being an informant, for example based on their experience, knowledge, or role in the context being studied. Primary data was obtained directly from research informants through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and relevant documentation. Interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and administrators at the Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School in Medan, with the aim of exploring their experiences, perspectives, and responses to the phenomenon under study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Ethical Communication Gap in Daily Interactions

The field observations and interviews revealed that many students at MTs Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School exhibit challenges in maintaining ethical communication norms. Teachers reported frequent interruptions during lessons and students' tendency to engage in dismissive or disrespectful dialogue. These behaviors highlight a clear disconnect between the moral teachings of Aqidah-Akhlaq and their actual implementation in students' interpersonal communication. As one teacher noted: This dissonance reflects what Roorda et al. (2011) describe as the failure of emotional connection in classroom communication, leading to disengagement and diminished academic and behavioral outcomes. It also reinforces the idea that effective moral education must go beyond content delivery, emphasizing application through modeled communication.

Interviews with teachers and students confirm that Aqidah-Akhlaq classes have the potential to be transformative when delivered with dialogical and reflective pedagogical methods. Instead of merely focusing on doctrinal content, when teachers actively incorporate role-playing, peer discussions, and real-life ethical dilemmas into their instruction, students become more engaged and self-aware. This finding aligns with Fink et al (2022), who emphasize that moral education must be participatory and context-sensitive, allowing students to internalize values through experiential learning. Therefore, Aqidah-Akhlaq should not merely be viewed as a doctrinal subject, but rather as a medium to cultivate communication ethics rooted in Islamic values.

The research also finds that teachers at Darul Qur'an serve not only as conveyors of knowledge but as key facilitators of ethical behavior through their everyday communication. When teachers demonstrated respectful dialogue, listened empathetically, and responded constructively to student misbehavior, students were more likely to emulate those behaviors. As one teacher shared: This corresponds with the findings of Hurteau & Gagnon (2022), who emphasize the impact of perceived fairness and empathy in shaping student conduct. The communication climate shaped by the teacher becomes a learning environment where values are lived, not just taught.

One of the most critical findings of this study is the strategic integration of information literacy as a foundational component in fostering ethical communication. Information literacy is not merely regarded as the technical skill of locating and accessing information but as a reflective and critical approach to communication itself. When students are encouraged to assess the credibility of sources, consider the consequences of their words, and cross-examine messages in light of religious values, they begin to develop into communicators who are not only eloquent but also thoughtful and ethically grounded.

This approach creates a learning environment that merges cognitive development with moral awareness. Information literacy becomes a framework for cultivating communication integrity, prompting students to refrain from engaging in the spread of hoaxes, slander, or hate speech, whether in face-to-face interactions or digital platforms. They begin to understand that every word expressed and every post shared carries social and spiritual consequences that cannot be ignored.

Moreover, when information literacy is directly linked with Islamic ethical values, the learning process evolves from a technical skill acquisition to a deeper internalization of moral principles. Students are guided to use technology responsibly, maintain etiquette in online

interactions, and consider the long-term implications of their digital footprints. In this context, information literacy is not only a protective shield against misinformation and cyberbullying but also a vital tool for character building and moral development.

The implementation of this approach within educational institutions fosters healthy and inclusive dialogue. Students are trained to listen actively, respect differing opinions, and articulate their views in a respectful and reasoned manner. The ability to think critically and reflectively becomes an essential foundation for building harmonious communication in school, family, and community settings. As such, the integration of information literacy with ethical communication education lays the groundwork for nurturing a digitally literate generation that is both intellectually competent and morally resilient.

These outcomes suggest that information literacy must be repositioned within pesantren curricula not as an auxiliary skill, but as a core component of student development, especially in addressing behavioral issues such as bullying in a more holistic and faith-aligned manner. Despite these promising practices, the study identifies structural limitations that hinder full implementation. The reliance on teacher or guardian initiatives without standardized modules, institutional policies, or training frameworks creates inconsistency. The lack of formal integration of ethical communication and information literacy into the curriculum highlights the need for systemic reform.

Based on this, the school must develop teacher development programs that include training in adolescent psychology, communication ethics, and literacy pedagogy ensuring that what is taught aligns with how it is taught and practiced. Without this institutional support, ethical communication remains an individual effort rather than a school-wide culture. To bridge this gap, Islamic boarding school leadership must institutionalize the integration of communication ethics and information literacy within the formal curriculum, especially in subjects like Aqidah-Akhlaq where values are central. Only through such comprehensive reform can pesantren effectively cultivate not only pious but also critically literate and socially responsible students.

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Aqidah-Akhlaq should not merely be viewed as a doctrinal subject, but rather as a medium to cultivate communication ethics rooted in Islamic values. When designed and delivered with participatory and experiential learning strategies, this subject can serve as a powerful tool for character development, ethical reasoning, and the prevention of harmful behaviors such as bullying, gossip, and verbal abuse. The transformation of Aqidah-Akhlaq into a space of ethical dialogue is essential for preparing students to become responsible communicators in an increasingly complex digital

### **Integration of Information Literacy to Strengthen Ethical Dialogue**

One of the most significant insights of the study is the strategic integration of information literacy as a tool for enhancing ethical communication. By encouraging students to critically evaluate the sources of information, reflect on the impact of their speech, and cross-reference religious texts, the school begins to foster a generation of communicators who are not only articulate but also responsible and reflective. As emphasized by Dalimunthe et al. (2024), information literacy provides the scaffolding for students to navigate digital and interpersonal spaces with integrity. It becomes a means to avoid miscommunication, gossip, and cyberbullying issues that are increasingly prevalent in both offline and online school environments.

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This integration is not merely functional but deeply formative. Information literacy, when paired with ethical guidance rooted in religious values, empowers students to recognize bias, avoid manipulation, and engage in communication that promotes harmony rather than division. In the context of Islamic education, this literacy extends beyond technical skills into moral discernment where students are taught to align their digital actions with *akhlāq al-karīmah*. Consequently, this model of learning reinforces the holistic development of students, cultivating not just cognitive ability but also character and civic responsibility in the digital age.

A unique finding of this study relates to the boarding school (*pesantren*) setting, where dormitory life becomes a microcosm of student behavior. Dorm guardians reported that communication breakdowns often lead to conflict among students. However, when guardians adopt ethical communication strategies such as active listening, reflective questioning, and non-punitive correction they notice a gradual shift in student attitudes. By reframing literacy as a moral compass and self-regulation tool, the dormitory becomes more than a space for sleeping it evolves into a learning laboratory for building empathy, dialogue, and ethical discernment. In this context, dorm guardians shift from passive supervisors to active facilitators of moral and cognitive growth, empowered not just by authority but by relational trust and educational strategies.

One of the most critical findings of this study is the strategic integration of information literacy as a foundational component in fostering ethical communication. Information literacy is not merely regarded as the technical skill of locating and accessing information but as a reflective and critical approach to communication itself. When students are encouraged to assess the credibility of sources, consider the consequences of their words, and cross-examine messages in light of religious values, they begin to develop into communicators who are not only eloquent but also thoughtful and ethically grounded (Mursyidawati, 2021).

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Moreover, when information literacy is directly linked with Islamic ethical values, the learning process evolves from a technical skill acquisition to a deeper internalization of moral principles. Students are guided to use technology responsibly, maintain etiquette in online interactions, and consider the long-term implications of their digital footprints. In this context, information literacy is not only a protective shield against misinformation and cyberbullying but also a vital tool for character building and moral development.

The implementation of this approach within educational institutions fosters healthy and inclusive dialogue. Students are trained to listen actively, respect differing opinions, and articulate their views in a respectful and reasoned manner. The ability to think critically and reflectively becomes an essential foundation for building harmonious communication in school, family, and community settings. As such, the integration of information literacy with ethical communication education lays the groundwork for nurturing a digitally literate generation that is both intellectually competent and morally resilient.

These outcomes suggest that information literacy must be repositioned within pesantren curricula not as an auxiliary skill, but as a core component of student development, especially in addressing behavioral issues such as bullying in a more holistic and faith-aligned manner. Despite these promising practices, the study identifies structural limitations that hinder full implementation. The reliance on teacher or guardian initiatives without standardized modules, institutional policies, or training frameworks creates inconsistency. The lack of formal integration of ethical communication and information literacy into the curriculum highlights the need for systemic reform. Based on this, the school must develop teacher development programs that include training in adolescent psychology, communication ethics, and literacy pedagogy ensuring that what is taught aligns with how it is taught and practiced.

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## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that a significant ethical communication gap exists among students at MTs Darul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School, stemming from the disconnect between moral instruction and daily interpersonal practices. Although Aqidah-Akhlak classes are designed to instill Islamic values, their effectiveness is undermined when delivered through conventional, non-dialogical methods. However, when these subjects are taught using participatory approaches such as role-play, reflective dialogue, and real-life moral dilemmas students demonstrate increased engagement, empathy, and awareness. This confirms the transformative potential of Aqidah-Akhlak when reimagined not merely as a doctrinal subject, but as a medium for cultivating ethical communication skills. The role of teachers and dormitory guardians is found to be pivotal. Their ability to model respectful, empathetic, and constructive communication significantly influences students' behavioral outcomes. When teachers and caregivers consistently demonstrate ethical dialogue and relational trust, students internalize these values more deeply and apply them in peer interactions, thus fostering a positive communication culture within the pesantren environment.

Another critical conclusion of the study is the strategic integration of information literacy into ethical education. When framed not just as a digital skill but as a moral framework, information literacy enables students to evaluate sources critically, regulate their speech, and



align their communication with Islamic values. It becomes a vital tool in preventing miscommunication, cyberbullying, gossip, and other ethical breaches that commonly occur in both digital and face-to-face settings. This integration encourages the development of students who are not only digitally competent but also morally discerning and socially responsible. However, the study also highlights systemic barriers.

The reliance on individual teacher initiatives, the absence of standardized curricula, and the lack of institutional training on communication ethics result in inconsistent practices across the school. Without systemic reform, ethical communication remains a fragmented effort rather than an embedded school-wide culture. It is essential that pesantren institutions reposition information literacy and communication ethics as core elements of their formal curriculum especially within value-based subjects like Aqidah-Akhlaq. Institutional leadership must invest in comprehensive teacher development programs that include training in adolescent psychology, ethical communication pedagogy, and digital literacy. Only through such a holistic and structured transformation can Islamic boarding schools prepare students not only to be pious individuals but also to be articulate, empathetic, and ethically grounded communicators ready to engage in both local and global societies.

## **SUGGESTION**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for educators, policymakers, and Islamic boarding school administrators. First, Islamic educational institutions should formally integrate ethical communication and information literacy into the Aqidah-Akhlaq curriculum through standardized modules, ensuring consistency across teaching practices. Second, teacher development programs must be prioritized, focusing on adolescent psychology, participatory pedagogy, and digital ethics to strengthen educators' capacity as role models. Third, dormitory guardians should be trained to apply ethical communication strategies in daily interactions, turning the boarding environment into a living laboratory for character formation. Fourth, information literacy should be framed not only as a technical skill but also as a moral compass to prevent misinformation, cyberbullying, and unethical discourse, both online and offline. Lastly, future research may employ comparative or longitudinal approaches to assess the long-term impact of integrating communication ethics and literacy on students' character development across different pesantren contexts.

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