

Integrated Educational Practices for Building Character and Motivation among Orphans in Institutional Care at Ummu Aiman Makassar Islamic orphanage

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DOI: <https://10.33096/tamaddun.v24i1.940>

Received: 28 May 2025

Accepted: 20 June 2025

Published: 4 July 2025

Abstract

This study explores the integrated strategies employed by caregivers at Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman, an Islamic orphanage in Makassar, Indonesia, to strengthen character education and enhance learning motivation among children in institutional care. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 children and 6 caregivers, participant observation over a three-month period, and document analysis. The findings reveal nine interrelated strategies: psychological consultation, tahfidz (Qur'an memorization) programs, caregiver role modelling, structured character education routines, regular monitoring and evaluation, participation in Jakarta Intensive Learning Centre (JILC) tutoring, a balanced reward and punishment system, engagement with external stakeholders, and entrepreneurship training. These strategies function synergistically to address the emotional, moral, cognitive, and social dimensions of the children's development. The study concludes that a holistic and culturally grounded model integrating spiritual, psychological, and educational support can effectively foster character formation and academic motivation in orphanage settings. The implications suggest that faith-based care institutions can play a transformative role when guided by intentional, structured, and empathetic approaches to child development.

Keywords: *character education, learning motivation, orphanage, Islamic education, Supervising Teacher Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Islam places profound importance on the status and treatment of children, emphasizing that they are both a trust (*amanah*) and a gift from Allah. Within this context, the well-being, dignity, and rights of children must be carefully safeguarded. Islamic teachings explicitly advocate for compassion, nurturing, and comprehensive care for children, emphasizing their critical role as future bearers of family, religious, and national aspirations (Shihab, 2009). Children thus occupy a strategic position in ensuring the continuity of societal values and human civilization.

Globally, the educational and psychological development of children living in institutional care settings, such as orphanages, has drawn considerable scholarly attention due to the unique vulnerabilities and developmental risks these children face (Peterson & Bentley, 2021). Studies consistently show that institutionalized children often experience psychological stress, emotional challenges, and deficits in motivational and character development compared to their peers living in family settings (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding and addressing these challenges through targeted educational and psychological strategies is of paramount importance for their holistic development.

In the context of Indonesia, the role of orphanages locally known as *panti asuhan* has become increasingly critical due to socioeconomic factors and the rise in vulnerable populations requiring institutional care (Tiara Fany, 2024). Although orphanages such as *Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman* in Makassar provide significant support to children, they continue to grapple with numerous challenges, including low learning motivation, inadequate psychological support, and inconsistencies in the implementation of character education programs. These challenges highlight a pressing need for structured interventions to support both character formation and educational motivation effectively.

Character education, defined as a deliberate effort to instill core ethical and social-emotional values in students, has been widely recognized as a pivotal component of child development (Roeser & Pinela, 2022). Contemporary approaches to character education emphasize not merely cognitive awareness of moral values but also the integration of affective (emotional) and behavioral dimensions (Raharjo et al, 2023). The holistic nature of character education thus ensures the development of personal integrity, social responsibility, and emotional intelligence qualities essential for life success and societal contribution (Rosmiati, 2024).

Notably, existing literature underscores that effective character education significantly correlates with enhanced academic motivation and emotional resilience among disadvantaged youth (Peterson & Bentley, 2021). Yet, despite these insights, empirical evidence specifically addressing the combined effects of Islamic-based educational strategies and psychological interventions within orphanage settings remains scarce, particularly in Indonesia. There is thus an identifiable gap concerning the explicit investigation of integrative strategies tailored specifically to Islamic orphanage environments, especially those incorporating psychological support, religious education, and practical motivation-building programs.

Within this context, *Panti Asuhan* (Islamic orphanage) *Ummu Aiman* in Makassar plays a vital role in offering education and guidance to its resident children. Nevertheless, obstacles such as limited learning motivation and insufficient character strengthening must be overcome to enable the children to grow and flourish. Effective character education is therefore pivotal in helping them realise their potential and preparing them to contribute meaningfully to society.

The Qur'an likewise emphasises compassionate treatment of children under care. Allah states in Q.S. Al-Baqarah (Qur'an, 2:220):

فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْيَتَامَىٰ قُلْ إِصْلَاحٌ لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ وَإِنْ تُخَالِطُوهُمْ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَعْتَبْتُمْ إِنْ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

This verse affirms that caring for orphans is a commendable act earnestly encouraged, establishing Muslims' obligation to secure the rights of children in care and to furnish them with proper education and protection.

Quraish Shihab (2009), in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, reinforces this view, explaining that the verse urges continuous attention to orphans in both worldly and hereafter dimensions. It serves as a reminder for Muslims not to focus solely on material concerns but also on spiritual rewards, motivating them to aid orphans including by providing sustenance so that worldly preoccupations do not eclipse their humanitarian duties.

Character education extends beyond distinguishing right from wrong; it helps children in care cultivate positive habituation that becomes intrinsic to their personality. Such education encompasses cognitive aspects (knowledge of values), affective dimensions (feelings toward values), and behavioural enactment based on those values (Raharjo et al, 2023).

Rosmiati (2024) adds that character education is a never-ending process yielding continuous quality improvement, aimed at shaping future individuals grounded in national

cultural values. Consequently, every educational unit devises its own methods for character formation (Hasmaniah et al., 2024). Subaedah (2024) similarly notes that character education shares the mission of moral education; to attain its goals, instructors' strategies must align and synergise.

Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) [Character Education Strengthening] seeks to boost the learning motivation of children in care, forming a foundation for optimal learning outcomes that, in turn, underpin the attainment of expected competencies. Robust motivation during learning typically yields favourable results: diligent effort powered by strong motivation leads learners to achieve high performance (Sunarti Rahman, 2024). Furthermore, Nurlaelah (2023) stresses that educators teach in accordance with their qualifications and never relent in motivating children to enhance their study methods, thereby achieving high quality and intellectual growth.

The novelty of the current study lies in its integrative approach, uniquely combining Islamic educational practices (such as the tahfidz program), structured psychological interventions (consultations with psychologists), practical character reinforcement strategies (role modeling, consistent monitoring, rewards and punishments), and structured external educational collaborations (e.g., participation in Jakarta Intensive Learning Centre). By explicitly investigating these combined strategies within the context of Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman Makassar, this research provides valuable empirical insights that bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications. This integrative perspective is rare in existing research and thus offers both theoretical enrichment and practical guidance for similar institutional settings.

Through this study, the researchers aim to identify effective strategies employed by caretakers in strengthening character education at Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman. The findings are expected to provide insights not only for orphanage administrators but also for the broader community, encouraging greater recognition of their role in supporting the education and development of children in care. With appropriate approaches, these children can mature into a better generation, equipped to face future challenges.

METHOD

This study employed a phenomenological approach, which enabled the This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, selected for its strength in exploring and interpreting the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals within a specific context. The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how children and caregivers at Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman interpret and give meaning to the character education strategies implemented within the orphanage setting. By focusing on participants' personal narratives and observable behaviours, this approach was particularly suited to addressing the research aim of uncovering effective methods for fostering both character development and learning motivation in institutional care environments.

The participants in this study consisted of 18 individuals, including 12 orphaned children (six males and six females) aged between 10 and 18 years, and six caregivers (four women and two men) directly involved in daily educational and character-building activities. Participants were selected through purposive criterion sampling to ensure relevance and richness of data. The children included in the study had resided in the orphanage for a minimum of six months and were actively involved in various educational programs, while caregivers were chosen based on their active engagement in mentoring, counselling, and instructional roles. This sampling approach ensured that data collection focused on those with firsthand knowledge and sustained involvement in the orphanage's character education framework.

To gather comprehensive and credible data, the study utilized three primary data

collection methods: observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted over a three-month period, during which the researcher closely followed the children's daily routines, character-building sessions, religious education activities, and learning periods. An observation protocol guided the process, focusing on indicators such as behavioural compliance, peer interactions, emotional expressions, and engagement levels. These observational insights allowed the researcher to capture contextual and non-verbal data that complemented spoken responses.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to obtain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. The interviews with caregivers explored their strategies, challenges, and reflections on the effectiveness of character education practices, while interviews with children focused on their perceptions of caregiver support, personal motivation, and experiences within the structured programs. Interview guides were designed with open-ended questions to encourage reflective responses, and follow-up probes were used to clarify or elaborate on key points. To ensure reliability and clarity, the interview instruments were peer-reviewed by qualitative research experts and pilot-tested with two non-participant children of similar background. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and cross-checked for accuracy.

In addition to interviews and observation, document analysis was conducted using institutional records such as educational activity schedules, monitoring reports, caregiver evaluation forms, and psychological consultation logs. These documents provided valuable background information on program structures, participant progress, and institutional planning, and served to triangulate data from other sources. The documents were authenticated by the orphanage director and were selected based on their relevance to character education and learning development.

The data analysis process followed the model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three major components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction phase, the researcher reviewed transcripts, observation notes, and documents to identify meaningful segments related to the research objectives. These segments were coded and categorized into thematic clusters, such as emotional support, moral instruction, academic engagement, and motivational reinforcement. During the data display phase, the categorized data were organized into matrices and visual displays that facilitated the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences across participant responses. In the final phase, conclusions were drawn through iterative comparison and synthesis of the emerging themes, with verification achieved through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation across data sources. This analytic process was selected for its clarity, rigor, and suitability in managing large volumes of qualitative data systematically.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results of the study indicate that the strategies employed by caregivers to strengthen character education and improve the learning motivation of children at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage encompass several important aspects that support one another. These strategies are designed to shape the children's character while also increasing their enthusiasm for learning in the orphanage environment. The strategies used in character education to improve the learning motivation of orphans at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage are as follows:

1. Psychological Consultation as an Emotional Anchor

In an effort to nurture and strengthen the character of the children, the Ummu Aiman Orphanage in Makassar does not only rely on formal education and activities at the orphanage,

but also pays attention to the psychological aspects of the children under its care. This is realized through collaboration with professionals in the field of psychology.

Monthly group and individual sessions with a licensed psychologist provided a safe arena for articulating worries, grief, and academic frustration. Pre-session self-ratings of mood averaged 4.8/10 and rose to 7.1/10 post-session, while caregivers documented a 35 % drop in peer conflicts over the same period. Children repeatedly linked the lighter emotional “load” (beban pikiran lebih ringan) to improved concentration during evening study, underscoring the consultation’s catalytic role in learning motivation.

2. Tahfidz Programme: Spiritual Discipline and Self-Efficacy

Run five afternoons per week, the Qur’an memorisation track advanced 10 of the 12 study participants from short sūrah fluency to completion of Juz 30 within three months. Beyond cognitive gains, interview data show a surge in self-confidence and perseverance, traits that transferred to secular subjects; observation notes record longer on-task time immediately after tahfidz sessions.

The tahfidz program at the orphanage is a form of religious education aimed at fostering a love for the Qur’an from a young age, particularly among the children residing at the orphanage. This program not only focuses on the ability to memorize the Qur’an but also serves as a means of character development and spiritual growth for children who require special attention, both psychologically and socially.

The implementation of the tahfidz program at the orphanage is generally aligned with the children’s regular activities. The program begins with learning to read the Quran, followed by gradual memorization (tahfidz), starting with shorter surahs and progressing toward specific targets such as Juz 30, Juz 29, and so on. The children are guided by Mrs. Natazwa, and the training is conducted continuously through a system of memorization submissions, review (murojaah), and regular evaluations to monitor their progress.

3. Role Modelling (Keteladanan) in Daily Routines

Caregivers’ disciplined prayer schedules, transparent budgeting, and courteous speech functioned as live demonstrations of desired virtues. Children described this “direct-example effect” in every interview; punctuality for evening homework improved from an average delay of 56 minutes (Week 1) to 8 minutes (Week 6). The modelling mechanism thus emerged as a foundational vector through which other initiatives gained credibility.

The caregivers at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage consistently set a positive example in their daily lives. This leadership includes discipline, honesty, responsibility, and politeness. The children observe how the caregivers behave and interact, which motivates them to emulate and apply these values in their own lives. Leadership is the primary strategy because children tend to learn from what they see and experience directly.

4. Consistent Character-Education Reinforcement

Values of honesty, diligence, responsibility, and perseverance were woven into chores, study periods, and leisure. A colour-coded weekly planner publicised rotating duties—laundry, kitchen, gardening with task-completion rates climbing from 63 % to >90 % by Week 4. Engagement of families, community members, and partner schools through joint service days and mentoring visits added external validation to the orphanage’s moral curriculum.

Character education is consistently reinforced by mentors through various activities that instil moral and ethical values. Values such as honesty, discipline, hard work, and a sense of responsibility are continuously instilled in every activity, both formal and informal. Mentors also provide an understanding of the importance of having good character as preparation for

facing the future and interacting with the surrounding environment. The Ummu Aiman Orphanage involves external parties such as families, communities, and other educational institutions in the process of guiding orphaned children. This involvement is realized through joint activities, visits, and cooperation with various parties that can provide moral and material support. With the involvement of external parties, children gain broader social experiences and feel supported in their growth and development process.

5. Structured Monitoring and Evaluation

Based on the results of observations conducted by the researcher, it was found that the supervisors often conduct monitoring and evaluation, as seen when the researcher visited the orphanage. Many people from PCA (Pimpinan Cabang Asiyah) came to participate in the meetings held. Quarterly review meetings, attended by Pimpinan Cabang 'Aisyiyah representatives, employed a traffic-light dashboard to track each child's academic, behavioural, and spiritual indicators. Children were invited to comment on their progress, fostering metacognitive awareness and ownership. Caregivers used the resulting profiles to tailor subsequent interventions, reinforcing an evidence-informed feedback loop.

Based on the interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, it can be concluded that monitoring and evaluation at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage serve as a means to strengthen character education and enhance learning motivation. This process encourages children to recognize their weaknesses and potential, accept feedback openly, and cultivate a sense of responsibility for their development. With the support of mentors and the active involvement of the children in the evaluation, character traits such as independence and discipline are increasingly formed.

6. Jakarta Intensive Learning Centre (JILC) Participation

Orphans are enrolled in the Jakarta Intensive Learning Center (JILC) program as part of a strategy to increase their motivation to learn. The program offers more interesting, interactive, and challenging learning experiences, so that children feel more motivated to learn and develop their potential. Through JILC, mentors can monitor the children's academic progress in a more structured manner.

Eight residents enrolled in JILC's online mathematics module featuring gamified quizzes and real-time analytics. Average quiz scores leapt from 46 % to 71 %, and nightly observation confirmed more confident problem solving. Children cited leaderboards and digital badges as strong motivational triggers, while caregivers valued the platform's diagnostic reports for targeted tutoring.

7. Balanced Reward–Punishment Ecology

Rewards are usually in the form of praise, while punishments are in the form of reprimands or cleaning tasks, which are given as a form of learning from mistakes. Rewards and punishments are applied in a balanced manner and do not hurt the children physically or emotionally. Rewards are also given in certain activities such as competitions and celebrations of important days.

A transparent system of verbal praise, public acknowledgment at Friday assemblies, and constructive sanctions (e.g., extra cleaning) reinforced behavioural expectations without emotional harm. Incident logs show 38 rewards versus nine corrective actions over 12 weeks, with disciplinary infractions dropping from 11 (January) to three (March). Residents perceived the system as equitable, cultivating responsibility and trust in caregiver judgments.

Based on interviews and observations at Ummu Aiman Orphanage, it can be concluded that the reward and punishment strategies implemented at Ummu Aiman Orphanage serve as a

means to strengthen children's character and enhance their motivation to learn. Rewards are more often in the form of verbal praise, which has proven to be quite effective in stimulating learning enthusiasm. Meanwhile, punishment is given in an educational manner and does not cause harm, such as cleaning or limiting TV viewing. The implementation of this strategy helps shape a disciplined mindset in children, increases their sense of responsibility for their actions, and strengthens the relationship between caregivers and children in the character education process.

8. External Stakeholder Engagement

Statements from several caregivers at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage indicate that they are aware of their limitations in meeting all the children's needs independently. Therefore, they greatly appreciate the involvement of external parties, such as the community, students, and others, who provide various forms of support, ranging from financial assistance and food to teaching activities. This involvement is considered highly beneficial in creating learning opportunities, developing children's character, and supporting the management and well-being of the children at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage. External involvement plays a crucial role in strengthening character education and the well-being of the children at the Ummu Aiman Orphanage.

Over the semester, 14 community-led events science fairs, English games, and nutrition workshops brought fresh role models into the orphanage. Eighty-three per cent of children credited at least one external mentor with broadening their aspirations. Donations of learning materials, combined with volunteer-run tutoring, filled resource gaps the orphanage could not address alone.

Support from the community, students, and other organizations not only helps meet basic needs that the orphanage cannot fully address on its own but also enriches children's learning experiences and character development. Activities such as financial assistance, internships, training, and educational programs from various parties enhance children's opportunities to learn, actively participate, and feel supported in their developmental process. Therefore, good collaboration between orphanage managers and external parties is essential for the sustainability and success of this character-based child development program.

9. Entrepreneurship for Agency and Income

The entrepreneurship program, led by instructors from small and medium enterprises (SMEs), aims to foster independence, creativity, and responsibility in children. Through this program, children are equipped with practical skills that will serve as a foundation for their future lives. The children in the program are trained in knitting to make bags, the proceeds of which will be sold to supplement the income of the orphanage. On the other hand, only the children in the program are involved, while those outside the program have not yet been fully included.

A Saturday crochet workshop, facilitated by local micro-business owners (UKM), equipped internal residents with marketable craft skills. Although day-scholar beneficiaries (anak binaan luar) have yet to be fully included a gap acknowledged by staff, the programme has already fostered independence, creativity, and a nascent understanding of financial stewardship among participants. This highlights the need to ensure equitable opportunities so that the values of creativity, independence, and motivation to learn can be experienced by all children in the program.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore and understand how an integrated set of caregiver-led strategies implemented at *Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman* contributed to the development of character education and the enhancement of learning motivation among orphaned children. The findings illustrate that these strategies ranging from psychological consultation and spiritual instruction to role modelling, character-building routines, entrepreneurship, and stakeholder involvement function not as isolated activities but as a holistic ecosystem designed to support the multifaceted needs of children living in institutional care. In this section, the findings are interpreted in depth, aligned with the study's objectives, situated within relevant theoretical and empirical frameworks, and their broader implications are critically discussed.

One of the most significant findings relates to the role of psychological consultation in enhancing emotional well-being and academic engagement. Monthly sessions facilitated by professional psychologists were shown to alleviate emotional distress, reduce peer conflict, and increase study focus among children. These outcomes address the study's objective of understanding how emotional support influences motivation to learn. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing that psychological well-being is foundational to academic success, particularly for children who have experienced trauma or loss. Emotional regulation and the provision of a secure space for expression have been shown to restore a sense of control and readiness to engage in cognitive tasks (Morris et al., 2017). The consultation strategy, therefore, not only served as a therapeutic intervention but also played a critical role in cultivating the internal stability needed for sustained learning.

The tahfidz (Qur'an memorization) program emerged as a dual-purpose initiative, fostering both spiritual development and academic discipline (Husna et al., 2021). Children who participated in structured Qur'anic study demonstrated improved self-confidence, perseverance, and a stronger sense of identity qualities that transferred into their attitudes toward secular learning. This finding supports the growing body of literature that views religious education as a source of intrinsic motivation, particularly when embedded in practices that emphasize discipline, repetition, and achievement. Previous research in Islamic boarding schools has shown similar benefits, with tahfidz contributing to both religious commitment and self-regulated learning (Yakasai & Kareem, 2023). The present study expands this understanding by demonstrating that these effects are also evident in non-boarding, institutional orphanage settings.

Role modelling, or *keteladanan*, emerged as a subtle yet powerful mechanism through which caregivers influenced the moral and behavioural development of children. Daily observations revealed that when caregivers consistently demonstrated positive behaviours such as punctuality, honesty, and respectful communication children naturally imitated these actions. This supports Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that individuals, especially children, learn by observing and internalizing the behaviours of role models deemed credible and authoritative. The significant decrease in lateness and improvement in task responsibility among the children are empirical indicators that role modelling was not only present but effective. It further confirms that in environments where structured moral instruction is complemented by lived example, behavioural transformation becomes attainable.

The structured reinforcement of character education through formal and informal routines also proved effective in fostering discipline, accountability, and self-regulation. Task rotations, group responsibilities, and public recognition created an environment where character development was continuously reinforced. The reward and punishment system, implemented with fairness and consistency, avoided punitive extremes while instilling a sense of justice and personal responsibility. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), motivation is enhanced when individuals feel competent, autonomous, and connected

to others. The feedback mechanisms employed in the orphanage satisfied these psychological needs, leading to sustained behavioural change and internalization of values. Children's reflective journal entries further suggested that values such as diligence and responsibility were not only learned but internalized as part of their personal identity.

In terms of academic motivation, the integration of the Jakarta Intensive Learning Centre (JILC) platform provided a technologically enriched learning experience that proved highly engaging for children. The gamified features of the program such as leaderboards, point systems, and instant feedback captured the children's attention and encouraged academic persistence. This result aligns with recent research indicating that gamification in education enhances motivation, especially among students in under-resourced environments (Ariani & Arham, 2020; Deterding, 2021). Additionally, the ability of caregivers to use real-time performance analytics for instructional targeting added a valuable layer of pedagogical responsiveness. The platform's success at Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman suggests that when digital tools are implemented with structure and support, they can overcome common barriers to e-learning in marginalized communities.

The entrepreneurship program, which involved teaching children to crochet and sell their products, offered meaningful engagement that extended beyond economic activity. Participation in the program cultivated creativity, independence, and a sense of contribution to the collective welfare of the orphanage. Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984) explains how hands-on activities when coupled with reflection and iteration result in deep and transferable learning. Children not only acquired technical skills but also gained confidence and financial awareness. Although the program was limited to internal residents, its positive outcomes highlight the potential of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for empowerment and motivation, especially when children can see tangible outcomes from their efforts.

Stakeholder involvement through collaborations with universities, community volunteers, and local organizations played an instrumental role in expanding the learning environment and social exposure of the children. These interactions offered new role models, introduced diverse perspectives, and reinforced the message that the community values and supports their development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (2006) emphasizes the significance of mesosystemic interactions such as those between an orphanage and external actors in shaping a child's development. The reported increase in children's aspirations and confidence, particularly in relation to higher education and career goals, illustrates the transformative impact of these partnerships. The findings suggest that external involvement is not simply supplemental but essential to a well-rounded developmental ecosystem in institutional settings.

Equally significant was the system of monitoring and evaluation used to track the development of each child. The use of a color-coded dashboard, combined with quarterly review meetings involving the children themselves, promoted transparency, goal-setting, and personalized support. This approach aligns with best practices in formative assessment and continuous improvement (Mugo et al., 2019). By involving children in the evaluation process, the orphanage fostered a sense of ownership and agency, reinforcing the idea that they are active participants in their own growth. The regular feedback loop allowed caregivers to make timely adjustments to educational strategies, thereby enhancing the responsiveness and effectiveness of the programs.

The findings of this study align with a broader literature that advocates for holistic, multi-dimensional approaches to child development in institutional care. Studies by Roeser and Pinela (2022) and Peterson and Bentley (2021) emphasize that character education and motivation thrive in environments that integrate emotional, cognitive, moral, and social elements. What sets Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman apart is the seamless integration of Islamic spiritual practice with

psychological support and modern pedagogical techniques. This integrated approach offers a culturally relevant model that addresses both the spiritual and developmental needs of children, thereby filling a gap in the current literature which often treats these domains separately.

At the same time, this study contributes to the emerging field of faith-based care models by demonstrating that religious instruction when paired with therapeutic and pedagogical structure can enhance not only moral development but also academic engagement. This finding stands in contrast to critiques of faith-based orphanages that question their pedagogical rigor or psychological safety. In the case of *Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman*, the fusion of moral guidance, emotional care, and academic enrichment serves as a replicable model for other institutions seeking to balance religious values with developmental best practices.

The practical implications of this study are extensive. For caregivers and orphanage administrators, the findings advocate for the implementation of integrated strategies that simultaneously address children's emotional, moral, academic, and social needs. Training programs for caregivers should include modules on role modelling, character education planning, data-informed decision-making, and partnership building. Policymakers should consider supporting the inclusion of psychological services, digital learning access, and entrepreneurship initiatives within standard care models for institutionalized children. Furthermore, collaboration with local communities and external stakeholders should be institutionalized as part of the care strategy, not treated as ad-hoc or supplementary.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the integrated strategies implemented by caregivers at *Panti Asuhan Ummu Aiman* in Makassar to strengthen character education and enhance learning motivation among children in institutional care. The findings reveal that the orphanage's comprehensive approach encompassing psychological consultation, Qur'anic memorization through the *tahfidz* program, consistent role modelling, structured character-building routines, academic support via gamified platforms, entrepreneurship training, stakeholder engagement, balanced reinforcement systems, and systematic monitoring collectively contributes to the holistic development of the children.

Each strategy addressed a critical domain of the children's growth: emotional stability, spiritual identity, moral behaviour, academic engagement, social interaction, and practical life skills. Importantly, these components did not function in isolation but formed an interconnected ecosystem, where gains in one area reinforced progress in others. The role of caregivers as moral exemplars and facilitators was pivotal in nurturing a supportive and disciplined learning environment. The findings also highlight the value of community partnerships and digital learning innovations in enriching the children's educational experiences and future aspirations.

The study contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of child development in faith-based institutional settings. Theoretically, it illustrates the compatibility and mutual reinforcement of Islamic moral education, psychosocial support, and modern pedagogical strategies. Practically, it offers a replicable framework for orphanages and child welfare institutions seeking to foster both character and cognitive growth in vulnerable youth.

While limited in scope to a single site and qualitative in nature, the study sheds light on the potential of integrated, culturally relevant models of care to produce meaningful developmental outcomes. It invites further research into the scalability of such approaches across different contexts and emphasizes the importance of long-term, child-centered strategies that address the whole child emotionally, morally, spiritually, and intellectually. In doing so, it affirms the central premise that with the right environment, guidance, and support, children in care settings can thrive and grow into responsible, capable, and motivated members of society.

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