

# Dalihan Na Tolu Culture and Islamic Education: Traditional and Religious Collaboration in Shaping Character

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## Abstract

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### Keywords:

*Dalihan Na Tolu;  
Islamic education;  
Character formation;  
Local culture;  
Mandailing  
community.*

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This research aims to examine the collaboration between the local culture of Dalihan Na Tolu and Islamic education in the formation of adolescent character in the Mandailing community. This study is motivated by the urgency of character education, which not only relies on the formal system based on religion but also utilizes the power of local cultural values as an authentic source of informal education. This study uses a qualitative method with a sociology of education approach. Data were obtained through interviews with traditional leaders, religious leaders, Islamic education teachers, and adolescents, participatory observation of Islamic traditional practices and educational activities, and analysis of cultural and religious documents. The results of the study show that the milieu has a vital role in shaping the character of adolescents. Cultural and religious collaboration is reflected in local Islamic traditions, local Islamic educational institutions, and conflict resolution mechanisms. This research provides the basis for the formulation of inclusive education policies based on local wisdom. The implication is that integrating local culture and Islamic education can enhance the effectiveness of character education, serve as an alternative model, and cultivate a young generation with character, tolerance, and competitiveness.

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## Abstrak

*Kata kunci:  
Dalihan Na Tolu;  
Pendidikan Islam;  
Pembentukan  
karakter;  
Budaya lokal;  
Masyarakat  
Mandailing.*

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*Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji kolaborasi antara budaya lokal Dalihan Na Tolu dan pendidikan Islam dalam pembentukan karakter remaja di masyarakat Mandailing. Kajian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh urgensi pendidikan karakter yang tidak hanya bersandar pada sistem formal berbasis agama, tetapi juga memanfaatkan kekuatan nilai budaya lokal sebagai sumber pendidikan informal yang autentik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosiologi pendidikan. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara dengan tokoh adat, tokoh agama, guru Pendidikan Islam, dan remaja, observasi partisipatif terhadap praktik adat dan kegiatan pendidikan Islam, serta analisis dokumen budaya dan keagamaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa milieu memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk karakter remaja. Kolaborasi budaya dan agama tercermin dalam tradisi Islam lokal, lembaga pendidikan Islam lokal, serta mekanisme penyelesaian konflik. Penelitian ini memberi dasar bagi formulasi kebijakan pendidikan inklusif berbasis kearifan lokal. Implikasinya, integrasi budaya lokal dan pendidikan Islam dapat memperkuat efektivitas pendidikan karakter, menjadi model alternatif, dan membangun generasi muda yang berkarakter, toleran, serta berdaya saing*

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in schools and madrassas often only emphasizes the cognitive aspect in the form of memorization of postulates or sharia rules, without emphasizing the internalization of values in the context of local culture (Günther, 2006). This creates a gap between normative religious teachings and social practices that should live in society (Arizona et al., 2025; Syamsuar et al., 2023; Umar et al., 2025; Zamroni et al., 2024). In practice, the younger generation is not uncommon to experience confusion: on the one hand they are taught moral values in religious education, but on the other hand they do not get concrete examples of its application in the traditional life based on *Dalihan Na Tolu* (Murryam & Asad, 2024). The problem is increasingly complex because collaboration between traditional leaders, religious leaders, and educators has not been established in an integrated manner (Moslimany et al., 2024). The function of moral education is still running sectorally, customs are only discussed in traditional ritual spaces, religion only in recitation forums or formal education, while schools are busy pursuing academic curricula (Permadi et al., 2025; Salamah et al., 2025). As a result, there is no synergy pattern that is able to bridge *Dalihan Na Tolu* with Islamic education as a single character formation model.

In the midst of globalization and the development of digital technology, people in the Mandailing area, especially the youth generation, face serious challenges in maintaining moral, ethical, and cultural identity (Sitorus & Susanti, 2024). Local traditions such as *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which actually teach respect and social responsibility, are beginning to be marginalized by individualistic lifestyles and external values that are not always in line with local wisdom and Islamic teachings (Harahap et al., 2023). On the other hand, Islamic education in schools and madrasas has not been able to fully reach the social reality of adolescents at home and in the environment (Asrohah et al., 2025; Haqpana, 2024; Shabrina et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2023). This is hampered by the lack of synergy between formal education and the indigenous values that live in the community (Yu et al., 2024). As a result, many adolescents show symptoms of moral degradation such as low respect for parents, increased consumptive behavior, abuse of social media, and lack of social awareness of their community. This problem indicates that there is a gap between the inheritance of *Dalihan Na Tolu* traditional values and the implementation of Islamic education in the daily lives of adolescents.

A number of previous studies have examined the relevance between local culture and character education, including the relationship between the values of local wisdom of *Dalihan Na Tolu* and Islamic education. Research conducted by Fata et. al., shows that the values in the structure of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, such as *somba marhula-hula* (respect for the giver of the wife), *elek marboru* (loving the recipient of the wife), and *manat mardongan tubu* (wisdom towards fellow brothers), have an important role in instilling the values of manners, responsibility, and social solidarity in adolescents. These values are in line with the basic principles of Islamic education which emphasize the formation of noble morals (*khuluq karimah*) (Fata et. al., 2025). Another study by Mohd. Rafiq also underlined that character education based on local culture is more effectively accepted

by students because it has emotional and historical closeness. In the context of Mandailing, the integration between Islamic teachings and the *Dalihan Na Tolu* culture has proven to be able to create a holistic and participatory educational atmosphere, where traditional leaders, parents, and teachers work together in the process of character building (Rafiq, 2024). This is strengthened by a study by Rangkuti et al., which examines the role of traditional guiding education responding local culture, which basically contain Islamic educational values (Jauhari et al., 2025; Ramadhan et al., 2025; Rangkuti et al., 2021). A similar research was conducted by Basri. The results of his research show that local cultural values have a strong pedagogical content if integrated into Islamic education (Basri, 2024). That an approach that combines customs and religion is actually able to provide a wider space for the internalization of moral values that are contextual and not merely doctrinal.

Nevertheless, the above studies still tend to emphasize the relevance of Islamic cultural values and education in general, without delving more deeply into how these forms of traditional and religious collaboration function as a practical strategy in character building. This is where the novelty of this research lies. Not only confirming the alignment of *Dalihan Na Tolu values* with Islamic education, but also highlighting the interaction mechanisms, collaboration patterns, and synergy spaces between traditional leaders, parents, teachers, and religious institutions in the process of character formation. Thus, this research offers a new perspective that is more multidimensional and applicative, not only explaining conceptual relationships, but also revealing the collaborative role of tradition and religion in facing the challenges of modernization, globalization, and moral crises of the younger generation.

In this paper, what we want to test is the extent to which the local cultural values of *Dalihan Na Tolu* can collaborate effectively with Islamic education in shaping individual and community characters. This study seeks to prove that the values of local wisdom such as respect, balance, and social solidarity in *Dalihan Na Tolu* are not only in line with the principles of Islamic education that emphasize the formation of noble morals, but are also able to strengthen the effectiveness of character education when integrated harmoniously.

## **RESEAAARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory descriptive type. This approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand the social and cultural dynamics that occur in society, especially in seeing how the *Dalihan Na Tolu* culture and Islamic education collaborate in shaping the character of adolescents. The research location was chosen purposively, namely in the Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra, which is known as one of the areas that is still strong in maintaining the *Dalihan Na Tolu* culture as well as having an active Islamic education base. The selection of this location is based on the consideration that in this area there is a fairly intense interaction between traditional values and religious teachings in the daily life of the community, especially in the process of fostering adolescents (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research subjects

consisted of traditional leaders, religious leaders, Islamic religious education teachers, parents, and adolescents themselves. The determination of informants was carried out through purposive sampling techniques, which are based on the criteria of their involvement and knowledge of the object of study (Hashimov, 2015). Furthermore, the snowball technique is used to expand the network of informants from the recommendations of the main informants.

Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were carried out to observe traditional and religious activities involving teenagers, such as traditional ceremonies, recitation activities, and social interactions in the extended family. Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore experiences, views, and practices related to character formation through the role of customs and religion. The data obtained was analyzed using an interactive model from Miles and Huberman which included three stages, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn (Miles, 1994). To ensure the validity of the data, source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation techniques are used. Triangulation is important so that the data obtained has a level of credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Milieu as a Theoretical Approach**

In the modern educational landscape, the discourse on the formation of individual character always intersects with two main theoretical and methodological approaches, namely the nativist approach and the milieu approach. The nativist approach, which was initiated by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, among others, departs from the assumption that a person's potential and character are predominantly determined by factors of heredity inherent from birth (Schopenhauer et al., 2016). Within this framework, education only serves as a secondary instrument that refines innate potential, not as a substantial agent of transformation. This view carries serious implications: each individual is considered to have a relatively fixed and distinctive personality structure based on lineage, so education tends to be geared towards adapting to the biological nature of the learner. Although this approach places emphasis on the internal strengths of the individual, it also tends to reduce the vital role of the socio-cultural environment in the process of moral and character formation.

This kind of approach tends to negate the important role of social and cultural contexts in the process of human development. As an antithesis to nativism, milieu theory positions humans as dynamic creatures that are formed gradually through continuous interaction with their environment (Ghosh, 2024). In this perspective, human beings are not seen as static entities that are passive towards the environment, but rather as dynamic beings who are influenced and at the same time influence their environment. The environment in this context is not just a physical element such as climate or geography, but also includes the social, cultural, economic, and spiritual environment that directly shapes a person's value system and moral orientation (Chattapadhyay, 2024). The natural environment, for example, indirectly contributes to the formation of

endurance, discipline, and habits of a person's life (Jie, 2024). A teenager growing up in a mountainous area with limited access to public facilities tends to have higher physical toughness and independence compared to urban youth who live in convenience. Meanwhile, the social environment or association becomes a strategic space that greatly determines the direction and shape of a person's character. In the family realm, the relationship between parents and children, parenting styles, and intrapersonal communication play a role in internalizing moral values, such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. Schools, as formal institutions, are an important vehicle in instilling scientific values and social ethics, through a learning process that is not only cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor.

In the social domain, the family is the primary institution where the internalization of moral and affective values takes place (Elsayed, 2024). Parental parenting, intrapersonal communication, and the emotional climate in the household contribute directly to the formation of attitudes such as honesty, empathy, and responsibility. Formal educational institutions, such as schools and madrasas, complement the process through a curriculum that emphasizes not only the cognitive, but also affective and psychomotor aspects. Here, character education takes a holistic form that allows values such as discipline, tolerance, and cooperation to be instilled through meaningful learning experiences. In addition, the work environment and religious organizations become an advanced arena for the socialization of values, where individuals learn about professionalism, social solidarity, and spiritual orientation. The religious environment, in particular, mediates the formation of transcendental values that are collective, such as *ukhuwah*, sincerity, and responsibility towards others.

In the perspective of education, the milieu or environment is classified into two major categories, one of which is the natural environment. The physical environment in which a person grows such as climate, geographical conditions, and the availability of natural resources not only serves as a living setting, but also as a character-forming agent (Ansori et al., 2024). Nature provides challenges and stimuli that indirectly shape an individual's adaptive response, so that values such as resilience, independence, and discipline can grow naturally in a person. In other words, the natural environment is not neutral, but rather has a profound influence on the moral development and behavior of individuals. In a broader context, character formation is also inseparable from the social and cultural interactions that accompany one's life.

In contemporary reality, there is also a dysfunctional social environment, such as promiscuity among adolescents that facilitates the entry of deviant values, including hedonistic lifestyles, drug abuse, and moral decadence. This situation demands an adaptive and contextual approach to character education, relying not only on the formal structure of education, but also involving families, communities, and cultural actors in the process of adolescent development. In a pedagogical framework, the milieu can be classified into two main forms, the natural environment and the socio-cultural environment (Khoso et al., 2024). The natural environment is not neutral, but rather provides stimuli and challenges that affect the adaptive development of individuals.

Values such as toughness, perseverance, and discipline often grow naturally in geographic ecosystems that demand physical and mental endurance. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural environment is a forum for internalizing collective values through traditions, language, and daily practices. Local traditions such as *Dalihan Na Tolu* in the Mandailing community, when synergized with Islamic education, show the integration of values that enrich the process of character formation contextually and culturally. Noble values are not only taught verbally, but are also brought to life in collective actions and cultural symbols that are passed down through generations.

### **Forms of Traditional and Religious Collaboration in Character Development**

In the formation of adolescent character, the synergy between the local value system and the transcendental value system is the main foundation in people's lives, especially in the context of the Mandailing community. Historically and sociologically, the Mandailing people not only position *Dalihan Na Tolu* as a kinship system, but also as a normative framework that serves as a guideline for social ethics in establishing interpersonal and intergroup relationships. The noble values contained in it have been internalized from generation to generation, forming a social habitus and influencing the process of socializing character values for the younger generation ("Habituation of Religiosity," 2024). The main principles *Dalihan Na Tolu* are not only social norms, but also serve as pedagogical instruments that shape the character of adolescents (Amin & Ritonga, 2024). These three principles inculcate fundamental values such as responsibility, politeness, respect for social hierarchy, and collective solidarity of values that are essentially also in line with the teachings of ethics in Islamic education.



**Figure 1.** The involvement of religious experts and traditional leaders in

In an interview conducted at one of the traditional houses in Mandailing traditional leader, Lubis, explained that the formation of adolescent character in Mandailing cannot be separated from the synergy between local values inherited by ancestors and transcendental values derived from religious teachings. He emphasized that *Dalihan Na Tolu* is not just a kinship structure, but more than that it is a normative foundation that has been firmly rooted in people's lives. Our

young people are formed from an early age to understand and practice customary principles. They are taught to respect bones, love their children, and maintain a relationship with *dongan tubu*. It is all not only customs, but also life lessons, he said (*Interview With Mr Lubis (Mandailing Traditional Leader), 2024*).

In the perspective of character education, Islamic teachings have moral and spiritual dimensions that reinforce these local values. Islam encourages the formation of noble morals (*khuluq al-karimah*) through continuous education of faith, worship, and *muamalat*. Values such as *ta'dzim* (respect), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), responsibility, trust, and *tafakkur* (critical and reflective thinking), provide a transcendental basis that strengthens the internalization of the noble values of the Mandailing custom. Forms of cooperation between the *Dalihan Na Tolu* tradition and Islamic education in shaping the character of adolescents are manifested in various social and educational practices that take place in an integrated manner in the Mandailing community. First, this collaboration can be seen in the implementation of religious activities involving the structure of customary kinship. For example, in the grand recitation event, the role of the *mora*, *kahanggi*, and *anak boru* parties is not only limited to the technical organization of the event, but also responsible for accompanying and fostering adolescents to understand Islamic values and civilization according to their social position in the customary system. This creates a cross-generational learning space that is effective in passing on ethical and spiritual values (*Observation in Mandailing, 2024*).



**Figure 2.** Collaboration of religious leaders and traditional leaders in religious events

In an interview conducted on the sidelines of a monthly recitation activity at one of the mosques in Mandailing Ustaz H. Burhanuddin Nasution, a religious leader and caretaker of the *taklim* council in the Mandailing area, expressed his views on the relationship between Islamic character education and traditional values. He emphasized that in the context of the Mandailing community, local values as reflected in *Dalihan Na Tolu* actually have strong ethical roots, and this is further strengthened by Islamic teachings. Islam came not to erase culture, but to perfect it. Values such as *ta'dzim*, *ukhuwah*, and *amanah* in Islam are in line with the

values in our customs, he said confidently (*Interview Ustaz Burhanuddin Lubis, 2024*).

Ustaz Burhanuddin explained that character education in Islam does not only talk about knowledge, but also the formation of morals. According to him, *khuluq al-karimah* is formed through a consistent and directed process of faith, worship, and muamalah education. When our children are invited to pray, recite, and be taught manners in traditional families, then they are being formed into moral individuals. He also emphasized the importance of the value of *tafakkur* or critical thinking which is part of Islamic education, so that the younger generation does not just obey blindly, but also understands the essence of the values they live. Furthermore, Ustaz Burhanuddin described how the synergy between Islam and customs in the social life of the Mandailing community is evident in various religious activities. One of them is the grand recitation which is routinely held in the villages. He said that in this activity, the role of customary structures was very felt. The *mora*, *kahanggi*, and *anak boru* were not only present as a complement to the event. They have a moral and spiritual responsibility in nurturing young people. There is a kind of division of social roles that makes teenagers feel guided, not judged.

Other forms of cooperation can be seen in local Islamic educational institutions such as madrassas or TPAs that are integrated with Mandailing cultural values. In some areas, the teaching of Islamic religious values is adapted to the local cultural context, including the use of traditional terms or symbols in the educational process. This allows the process of internalizing values to be more effective because it is conveyed through language and symbols that are close to the daily lives of adolescents.



**Figure 3.** Religious Education Using the Dalihan Na Tolu Custom in Forming Togetherness

During a visit to one of the madrassas in the Mandailing Godang area, we talked to Mrs. Hj. R. Lubis, a senior teacher who has been teaching for more than

two decades at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. He explained that the integration between Islamic education and local cultural values is not just a methodological approach, but a contextual pedagogical need. Our children catch lessons faster if they are delivered in a language they understand, which is close to their daily lives, he said while showing a lesson module that contains customary terms. According to Mrs. R. Lubis, one of the approaches she often uses is to insert Mandailing traditional values in the teaching of morals and *fiqh*. He gave an example of how the concept of *ta'dzim* in Islam is explained to students through traditional values but when we relate to the role of *mora* in customs, they immediately connect. Because it is part of their family life. He also said that the madrasah where he teaches often holds habituation activities such as congregational prayers, *tadarus*, and youth recitation which are packed with local nuances. In these activities, the students were invited to discuss Islamic values through stories from the life of the Mandailing community. We have raised the story of honest and trustworthy traditional leaders as a discussion material. Children become more enthusiastic because they know or have heard of the character from their parents, he said (*Interview With Mrs. HJ. R. Lubis, 2024*).

This synergy is also present in efforts to resolve social conflicts or foster problematic adolescents. In this context, customary and religious deliberation forums, such as clan deliberation or customary assemblies accompanied by *tausiyah*, become a restorative forum that not only solves problems structurally, but also provides character development through spiritual and cultural approaches. Thus, the cooperation between the *Dalihan Na Tolu* tradition and Islamic education forms a cohesive and contextual socio-educational system in instilling character values in the younger generation. Collaboration between the *Dalihan Na Tolu* tradition and Islam Therefore, the collaboration between Islam and *Dalihan Na Tolu* is not just a meeting of two value systems, but an active integration that gives birth to a distinctive, adaptive, and contextual character building model for the local community.

In an interview conducted on the sidelines of a mosque youth training activity in a village in Mandailing, Siregar (17 years old), a grade XI student of Madrasah Aliyah, shared his experience of participating in the coaching process after being involved in a small dispute between youth groups in his village. She admitted that she initially felt afraid of being humiliated, but it turned out that what she experienced was different. I was called to the traditional house, where there were traditional leaders, *ustaz*, and my parents. They weren't angry, but more talked nicely, he recalled. Ahmad explained that the deliberation forum he attended was not like a courtroom that judges, but a recovery room. He heard firsthand advice from traditional leaders about the importance of maintaining the good name of the clan and family. After that, an *ustaz* gave *tausiyah* about the morals of teenagers in Islam, about the importance of repentance, responsibility, and *ukhuwah*. At that time I really felt appreciated, but also reminded in a deep way. I'm ashamed of myself, but not because I'm being scolded, but because I feel like they all care, she said (*Interview With Siregar, 2024*).

This approach is different from simply being punished or sanctioned. He feels that there is harmony between traditional values and religious values that are united in fostering him, not only to solve problems, but to improve his attitude and outlook on life in the

future. Come to understand better, it turns out that the custom is not just about the party or the clan lineage. But there is also a traditional way of solving problems with heart, and Islam is the same, teaching softly.

### **The Role of Islamic Education in Shaping Adolescent Character**

The formation of adolescent character cannot be separated from the social dynamics and value structures that live in a society. In the sociological and educational framework, adolescent character is a product of a socialization process that is interactive, gradual, and influenced by value-forming agents, both formal and non-formal (Boyden & Levison, 2000). Two strategic actors who have normative legitimacy in society, namely traditional leaders and Islamic educational institutions, show complementary and mutually reinforcing functions in educating the character of the younger generation. An analysis of the role of both requires a multidimensional approach that includes cultural, religious, and psychosocial perspectives. Theoretically, this approach shows a preference for the community-based character education model, which emphasizes the importance of a valuable social environment in shaping personality. In this case, traditional figures and Islamic education do not stand alone, but become part of the ecology of character development that constructs value structures simultaneously from below (grassroots) and from above (normative-theological) (Powers, 2024). Therefore, strengthening the role of traditional leaders and Islamic education in the formation of adolescent character is not only culturally relevant, but also strategic as a social investment in nation building

Traditional leaders function as cultural bearers and managers of moral authority in traditional societies. In the paradigm of social constructivism, indigenous figures not only passively transmit cultural values, but also actively shape social reality through narratives, symbols, and customary practices (Sapkota, 2025). When adolescents interact with traditional figures in social spaces such as deliberations, traditional ceremonies, or conflict resolution forums, they are experiencing the process of empirically internalizing values such as politeness, collective responsibility, and respect for social hierarchy. That is, adolescent character is formed not only through verbal instruction, but through direct involvement in a living value structure.

In an interview with one of the traditional leaders, he emphasized that *adat* is not just a symbol or ceremony, but a value system that lives in the social practices of the community. Traditional leaders see themselves as guardians of values passed down from generation to generation, not only through lectures or advice, but especially through real actions that are seen and experienced directly by young people. According to him, when teenagers attend traditional deliberation forums, participate in traditional ceremonies, or engage in mutual cooperation activities, they are undergoing an empirical and collective process of character education (Effendi et al., 2025; Sabarudin et al., 2023). There, adolescents do not just understand values such as politeness and responsibility theoretically, but witness them in concrete social realities. The traditional leader also explained that traditional narratives, such as ancestral stories, as well as cultural symbols—including clothing, rituals, and manners in traditional gatherings—have extraordinary educational power. Ancestral stories, he said, are not ordinary fairy

tales, but a means of moral education that conveys messages about courage, justice, and loyalty to the community. Traditional symbols are also a means of internalizing collective identity and strengthening a sense of belonging to local culture. In this paradigm, adolescents' characters are formed not only through what they hear, but also through what they experience, live, and feel in their daily customary lives (*Interview With Mr R.Nasution (Panyabungan Traditional Leader)*, 2023).

Meanwhile, Islamic education provides a normative-transcendental framework that enriches character formation with spiritual and ethical dimensions. Within the framework of Islamic education theory, the process of *tarbiyah* is not just to instill knowledge, but to form Islamic *syakhsiyah* an integral Islamic personality. Islamic education offers a stable value orientation, rooted in revelation and strengthened by reason (Hendawi et al., 2024). Values such as *ṣidq* (honesty), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ḥilm* (patience), and *'adl* (fairness) become the moral basis that are formulated systemically in the curriculum and pedagogic practice (Azizah et al., 2024; Bhat & Bisati, 2025; A. R. Hakim et al., 2025). Through dialogical, interactive, and contextual learning, adolescents are directed not only to understand Islamic norms, but also to make them part of their identity and habits.

In an interview with one of the Islamic religious figures who also plays the role of an educator in Islamic educational institutions, he emphasized that Islamic education has a fundamental responsibility in shaping the personality (*syakhsiyah*) of adolescents as a whole. According to him, the *tarbiyah* process cannot be reduced only to the transmission of religious knowledge, but must be understood as a process of fostering sustainable values, character, and spiritual awareness. Islamic education, he emphasized, is rooted in revelation as a source of absolute value, combined with the power of reason to understand the social context and challenges of the times (*Interview With Mr Timbul (Religious Figures)*, 2023).

In practice, values such as *ṣidq* (honesty), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ḥilm* (patience), and *'adl* (justice) should be moral foundations that are not only taught textually, but also brought to life in the daily lives of adolescents through the example of teachers, social interactions, and supportive institutional systems (A. R. Hakim et al., 2025; Izzah & Magfiroh, 2025; Sefiana et al., 2025). Furthermore, the religious leader explained that the ideal Islamic education method is dialogical and participatory, not authoritarian. He criticized the educational approach that only emphasizes memorization and formal discipline, but ignores the internalization of values and the formation of Islamic habits (*habitus*) (Hadiati et al., 2025; M. N. Hakim & Mahmudati, 2024; Sefiana et al., 2025). In his view, adolescents need to be placed as active subjects in learning who not only accept doctrine, but are also invited to think critically, reflect, and experience Islamic values in real life in their social environment.

The two entities above, namely, culture and religion are seen interacting in a space that allows for the integration of local values and transcendent values. Structural analysis shows that this collaboration is able to overcome the dichotomy between tradition and religion, between locality and universality. In this context, it is important

to have an intercultural and interdisciplinary approach, where local traditional values can synergize with universal Islamic values to form the character of adolescents who are firmly rooted but adaptive to the changing times. Adolescents are not only formed into moral individuals, but also into social agents who are aware of their cultural identity and have a civilizational ethos.

## CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study show that the values contained in *Dalihan Na Tolu* when integrated with the principles of morality and spirituality in Islamic education, are able to create a stronger and more sustainable foundation for character formation than if relying solely on formal education. This research makes an important scientific contribution to the discourse of character education by showing that the process of character formation does not only depend on formal educational institutions, but is also strongly influenced by the social and cultural environment that internalizes values empirically and contextually. The study has some limitations that need to be noted. First, this study only focuses on the Mandailing community with a certain socio-cultural context, so the findings obtained cannot be widely generalized to other communities with different cultural backgrounds. Second, more research data is obtained through in-depth interviews and qualitative field documents, so there are still limitations in measuring the influence quantitatively, for example the extent to which the internalization of *Dalihan Na Tolu* values and Islamic education contributes directly to changes in the behavior of the younger generation. Therefore, follow-up research with a wider area coverage, using mixed methods, and involving more diverse respondents is needed to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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