

Caring Values in Islamic Religious and Moral Education on *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum: A Study of Fifth-Grade Student and Teacher Books

Dodi Ilham¹, Diah Asdiany², Andi Husni A. Zainuddin³, Nurdin K⁴, Muhammad Iksan⁵, Rustan Santaria⁶, Wahyullah Alanasir⁷

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palopo, Indonesia; dodi@iainpalopo.ac.id

⁷ Universitas Islam Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The philosophy of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which emphasizes a learning approach focused on learners' needs and potential, can strengthen caring values. This research analyzes the indicators for strengthening the value of caring in student and teacher books for Islamic religious and moral education. The research method used is a literature review. The study subjects are Islamic religious education and moral textbooks for Grade V in Sekolah Penggerak. The study found that the forms of strengthening the value of caring in the books only contain three sub-indicators: 1) affection, 2) empathy, and 3) sympathy. Based on these three sub-indicators, there are several benefits of strengthening the value of caring, including 1) improving the quality of student personality; 2) improving social skills; 3) increasing religious awareness, critical thinking skills, fostering positive attitudes towards learning, and improving the quality of life for learners. This research also recommends six forms of strengthening the value of caring educators, namely: 1) teaching the value of caring for the learner's environment; 2) providing real-life examples to learners; 3) using learning methods that encourage learner care; 4) teaching the value of caring for others to learners; 5) appreciating caring behavior, and 6) teaching care for other living beings. Overall, this research contributes to the field of education by highlighting the importance of caring values in student and teacher books, suggesting practical implications for curriculum development, textbook evaluation, teacher training, student development, and future research endeavors.

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Corresponding Author:

Dodi Ilham

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Palopo; dodi@iainpalopo.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education plays an important role in internalizing values of caring in students. Islam teaches its followers to help and care for one another, especially those in need (Barton et al., 2021; Ilham, 2020; Supriani et al., 2022). Caring in Islam also encompasses three important aspects: caring for oneself, others, and the environment. Therefore, Islamic Education also plays a significant role in internalizing caring

values in students (Karwadi, 2023). As stated in QS, Islam teaches its followers to help and care for one another, especially those in need. Al-Maidah (5) verse 2:

وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ...

Translation:

...And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty. (Qur'an Kemenag, n.d.).

According to Khasanah (2020), Quraish Shihab states that one of the messages in verse above is to help each other in doing good, meaning all forms and types of things that lead to worldly or spiritual benefits, and likewise, do not help each other in committing sins and violations. Care in Islam also includes three important aspects: caring for oneself, others, and the environment. Care is a very important character value to be developed in learning at the elementary education level. The character value of care can help children become more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others, as well as help them become responsible citizens who care about the environment. According to (Clouston, 2018), care is the ability to prioritize the interests of others over one's interests and the organization where one works. To develop values of caring and love, (Waugh et al., 2014) suggest that students must have qualities such as honesty, trust, good listening and communication skills, patience, tact, a sensitive and loving approach, and the ability to seek and act upon guidance. Therefore, elementary education units must facilitate and cultivate these qualities in the learning environment.

Furthermore, the learning environment needs to support the student's personal growth and development at cognitive, emotional, and spiritual levels. However, this is often overlooked in education and poses challenges. Therefore, the curriculum should support students in understanding, reflecting, and, if necessary, transforming their values of caring to develop a transcendent perspective (Purnomo, 2020). This perspective enables them to prioritize the interests of others above their own and those of the organizations they work for and to challenge others in situations where caring values are not met or upheld (Khasanah, 2020). Primary education institutions must facilitate students ready to engage in this learning process and educators who can serve as role models and facilitate learning relationships that enable student development. However, according to Widodo (2021), if caring values are to be realized in everyday practice, this transformative type of learning must be supported at a broader structural level, which can be a challenge.

The General Integrity Module and Anti-Corruption Education Module released by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) place care as one of the values that must be instilled in every Indonesian citizen (Direktorat SMP, 2022). It is also in line with the Anti-Corruption Value Map for Students issued by the Directorate of Primary Schools of the Directorate General of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education, which states that caring values have five keywords, namely: 1) love and affection; 2) empathy; 3) sympathy; 4) solidarity; and 5) mutual respect (Anti-Corruption Education, n.d.). Strengthening caring values is important in helping to increase social awareness and responsibility towards the surrounding environment. In the context of corruption prevention, the caring values held by each individual can help reduce opportunities for corrupt practices in society (Dwiputrianti, 2009). In primary school learning, caring values can be internalized through various methods, such as direct experience through social activities in the community, student-centered learning approaches, extracurricular activities, and exemplary behavior and actions in daily life (Bahri & Lestari, 2020). Therefore, educators should consider these aspects to help students internalize caring values and become responsible citizens.

Based on this foundation, to test the teaching of compassion in the Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education textbook, it is necessary to conduct content analysis, paying attention to whether there is material or content related to the value of compassion. Ideally, through a goals review of the learning outcomes stated in the textbook, how the learning material is presented, and whether the learning methods align with the principles of education that instill the value of compassion. Therefore, the results of this test can be used as input for improving the textbook and developing more effective and integrated compassion education in the context of Islamic religious education and moral education content.

Previous research has explored the potential of curriculum philosophies to foster caring values among learners. One such curriculum is the Merdeka Belajar curriculum (Maipita et al., 2021; Marisa, 2021; Suryaman, 2020), which prioritizes a learner-centered approach focused on meeting the needs and realizing students' potential. This research aims to contribute to this body of knowledge by conducting a literature review that examines the indicators for strengthening the value of caring in student and teacher books for Islamic religious and moral education. The study focuses on Grade V Islamic religious education and moral textbooks in Sekolah Penggerak, providing a specific context for analysis. Through the literature review, the research identifies three sub-indicators that are found to be significant in promoting caring values within these textbooks. These sub-indicators include affection, empathy, and sympathy (Burnier, 2021; Chismar, 1988), which are considered essential components for cultivating caring attitudes and behaviors among students. The research findings demonstrate the potential benefits of strengthening the value of caring within the educational context. These benefits encompass various aspects of student development, such as improving the quality of student personality, enhancing social skills, increasing religious awareness, fostering critical thinking skills, and cultivating positive attitudes towards learning (Alannasir, 2020; Althof & Berkowitz*, 2006), and ultimately improving the overall quality of life for learners (Retnawati et al., 2018; Wahyuddin et al., 2022). Recognizing and emphasizing elements such as affection, empathy, and sympathy in education can lead to diverse benefits like refining personalities, improving social skills, fostering religious awareness, nurturing critical thinking, and promoting positive learning attitudes. This approach positively impacts academic outcomes and enhances learners' overall quality of life. The study encourages ongoing exploration and integration of caring values in educational frameworks for a more holistic and enriching learning experience.

Furthermore, the research offers practical recommendations for educators to strengthen the value of caring in their teaching practices. The six recommended forms include teaching the value of caring for the learner's environment, providing real-life examples to learners, using learning methods that encourage learner care, teaching the value of caring for others, appreciating caring behavior, and teaching care for other living beings. These recommendations provide educators with actionable strategies to foster caring values and attitudes in educational settings. In summary, this previous research contributes to understanding how the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, emphasizing learners' needs and potential, can effectively strengthen caring values. In addition, the research provides insights into the potential benefits of caring education by analyzing the indicators for promoting caring values in student and teacher books for Islamic religious and moral education. The identified sub-indicators and recommended forms of strengthening caring values offer practical implications for curriculum development, teaching practices, and student development in educational contexts.

Umar (2020) cited Article 1, paragraph 1, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007, concerning Religious Education and Religious Affairs, which states that the purpose of Islamic religious education is to provide knowledge about religion and shape the attitudes, personality, and skills of students in practicing the teachings of their religion, which are implemented at least through subjects/lectures in all educational pathways, levels, and types. Meanwhile, Article 2, paragraphs 1 and 2, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007, mentions that religious education also functions to shape Indonesian citizens who have faith and devotion to the One Almighty God, possess noble character, and are capable of maintaining peaceful and harmonious relationships between and among religious communities. Furthermore, "Religious education aims to develop the ability of students to understand, appreciate, and practice the values of religion that harmonize with their mastery of science, technology, and art" (Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Affairs (PP No. 55 Tahun 2007 Tentang Pendidikan Agama Dan Pendidikan Keagamaan [JDIH BPK RI], n.d.).

Schools are considered capable of implementing education that promotes moral values. The word "budi" comes from the Sanskrit language, which means consciousness, understanding, and intelligence. In this context, consciousness is related to a person's inner state in living a life that has meaning by the norms corresponding to their beliefs (Mustari & Rahman, 2011). According to Jalil (2018), the term "budi" is a spiritual tool within human beings that combines reason and emotion to weigh good and bad things.

Therefore, “budi” can be interpreted as nature, character, good deeds, effort, and intelligence within human beings. On the other hand, the term “pekerti” also comes from the Sanskrit language and means actualization, appearance, implementation, or behavior in human beings. According to the Online Indonesian Dictionary, “pekerti” means behavior or actions (*Arti Kata Pekerti - Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Online*, n.d.). Therefore, this term is closely related to human behavior reflected in social behavior and attitudes (Brewer, 2003).

Althof & Berkowitz* (2006) state that moral education has the same substance and goals as character and moral education, which shape good and correct human character and behavior. However, there is a nuance in the use of these three terms. Moral education includes behavior, values, and ethics, while character education focuses on forming good character and piety in religious life. Meanwhile, character education emphasizes character formation related to community life, such as tolerance, solidarity, and social responsibility. The approach to character education differs from the approach to moral education and character education, which emphasizes religious values and ethics related to a specific religion or belief.

In 2022, through the Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology issued a Head Decision on Learning Outcomes in Early Childhood Education, Basic Education Level, and Secondary Education Level in the Merdeka Curriculum. In this decision, it is mentioned that the learning content of Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education will gradually and holistically be directed towards helping students become spiritually stable, of noble character, and understand the fundamentals of Islam and its applications in daily life within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Therefore, the learning content of Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education should generally direct students towards 1) a tendency towards goodness (*al-hanīfiyyah*), 2) a permissive attitude (*al-samḥah*), 3) noble character (*makārim al-akhḫāq*), and 4) compassion for the universe (*rahmat li al-ālamīn*).

Through the learning content of Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education, these fundamentals are then applied by students in believing and being mindful of Allah, taking care of themselves, and being concerned about humanity and the natural environment (Hella & Wright, 2009). The description of this application will be evident in several elements of Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education, especially in personal and social morals, faith, shari’a, and the history of Islamic civilization. The purpose of Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education is to guide students to have deep spiritual and good moral foundations and apply Islamic principles in daily life in Indonesia (Huda et al., 2017; Huda & Kartanegara, 2015). In addition, this learning also aims to develop critical thinking skills, a sense of responsibility as Allah’s stewards on earth, and to uphold the value of unity in diversity of religion, ethnicity, and culture.

This research addresses a critical gap in the existing literature on Islamic education, particularly in the context of caring values (Barton et al., 2021; Ilham, 2020; Karwadi, 2023; Supriani et al., 2022). Despite the acknowledged significance of Islamic teachings in instilling values of compassion, previous studies have not thoroughly examined the extent to which current Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education curricula and textbooks in Sekolah Penggerak embrace and emphasize caring values. The research questions are designed to dissect this area, delving into the curriculum’s alignment with Quranic verses and Islamic principles, the incorporation of essential sub-indicators such as affection, empathy, and sympathy in textbooks (Burnier, 2021; Chismar, 1988), and the broader impacts on student development. Furthermore, the study seeks practical insights for educators on implementing recommendations to strengthen caring values in the learning environment (Alannasir, 2020; Retnawati et al., 2018; Wahyuddin et al., 2022). Additionally, it explores the potential optimization of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum for the effective integration of caring values. It assesses the existing regulatory framework’s support for emphasizing caring values in Islamic education (Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Affairs). The research also probes into the roles of terms like “budi” and “pekerti” in the broader context of moral and character education within Islamic teachings (Althof & Berkowitz*, 2006; Mustari & Rahman, 2011). By addressing these questions, the

study aims to enhance caring values in Islamic education, fostering a more holistic and enriching learning experience for students in Indonesian primary schools. The question is how can the Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education curriculum in Sekolah Penggerak be enhanced to more effectively instill and emphasize caring values, guided by Quranic verses and Islamic principles, and how might this optimization contribute to a comprehensive learning experience for primary school students in Indonesia?

2. METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive literature review (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). The researcher describes how care values in Islamic religious education and character education are taught in this study. The primary data sources used are:

1. Teacher and student textbooks, which are the result of a collaboration project between the Ministry of Education and Culture (Number: 57/IX/PKS/2020) and the Ministry of Religion (Number: 5341 the Year 2020), compiled based on the reference of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia's Decree Number 958/P/2020 on Learning Outcomes in Early Childhood Education, Basic Education, and Secondary Education (*SIBI - Sistem Informasi Perbukuan Indonesia*, n.d.).
2. The Anti-Corruption Value Map for Students issued by the Directorate of Primary Schools of the Directorate General of Early Childhood Education, Basic Education, and Secondary Education (*Pendidikan Anti Korupsi*, n.d.).

The data analysis in this study employed content analysis, specifically utilizing caring indicators with sub-indicators, namely 1) Love and care, 2) Sympathy, and 3) Empathy. The criteria method was also employed, involving the dissection and categorizing of the contents within teacher and student textbooks based on these sub-indicators of care. The materials related to care values within these textbooks were thoroughly analyzed. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, three experts specializing in Islamic religious education, anti-corruption education, and character education validated the results. The experts' assessments confirmed the validity of the materials in aligning with care values, meeting the established criteria for data validity. The research followed the steps Kuhlthau (2002) outlined to provide a clearer understanding.

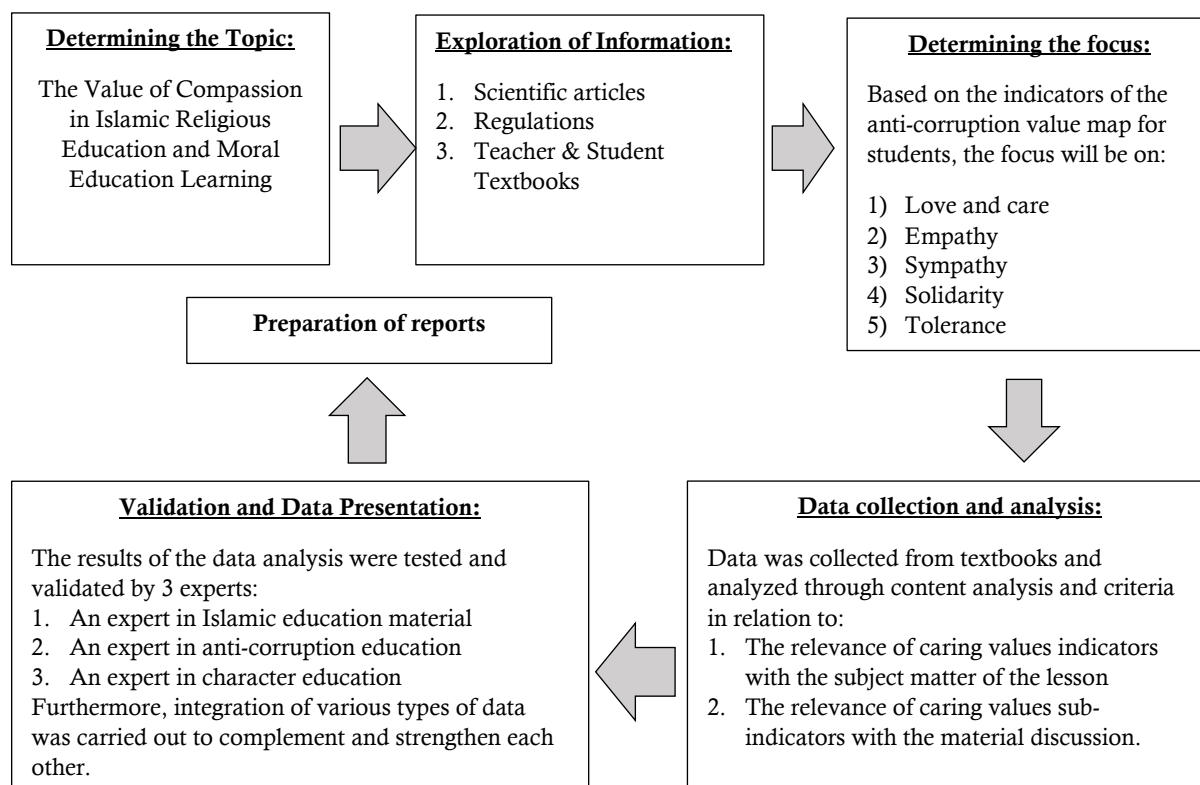


Figure 1. Research Design Flow adapted from Kuhlthau (2002)

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The material of Islamic education and character building based on research results emphasizes the value of compassion in all aspects of life. For example, in chapter one, entitled "Respecting Orphans," students are taught to understand the feelings and experiences of orphans, strive to meet their needs, and help them overcome difficulties. Its fundamental principle in education involves moral, social, and humanitarian aspects. As narrated by Sahl bin Sa'ad r.a., Prophet Muhammad PBUH., said:

أَنَا وَكَافِلُ الْيَتِيمِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ هَكَذَا ، وَأَشَارَ بِالسَّبَّابَةِ وَالْوَسْطَى وَفَرَجَ بَيْنَهُمَا شَيْئًا

The meaning:

"I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him will be in Paradise like this," putting his index and middle fingers together.." (Sahih Al-Bukhari 6005 - Good Manners and Form (Al-Adab) - كتاب الأدب - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم), n.d.).

Primary school students need to be taught about the virtues of caring for orphans in Islamic teachings, as stated in the hadith that those caring for orphans will be with Prophet Muhammad in paradise (Sukiran, 2019). In addition, they need to understand the concept of orphans, that they are children who have lost one or both of their parents and need attention and affection. Furthermore, the results of the indicators of caring values are presented through sub-indicators that have been validated by experts and are described as follows:

3.1.1 Strengthening caring values based on the sub-indicator of affection

Based on the research results, the sub-indicator of affection occupies the most discussion space in grade V's Islamic religious education and character education book. The word "affection" is recorded to be repeated three times in the teacher's guidebook and 14 times in the student's book. The material on Islamic religious education and character education contained in the Islamic Religious Education and Character Education Book for Grade V (Teacher and Student Books) contains caring in the form of affection as an important value that must be instilled in learning. Affection in Islam is interpreted as a genuine feeling of love and compassion towards fellow creatures of Allah SWT. This affection must be practiced daily towards other humans, animals, and the environment.

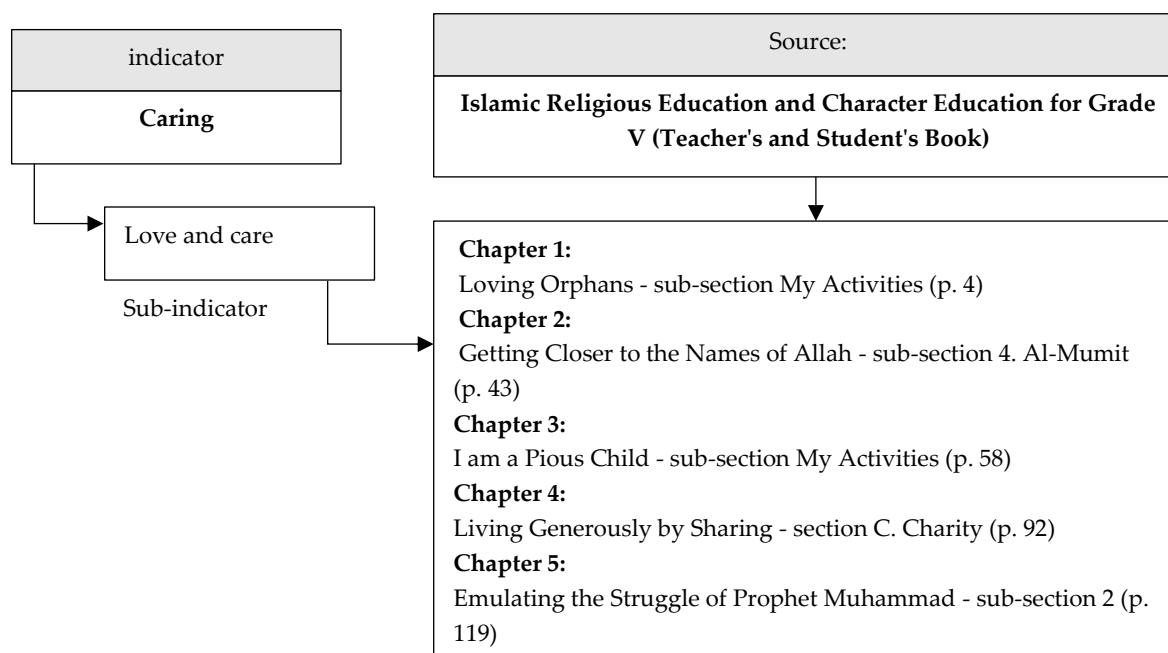


Figure 2. Concept Map of Compatibility of Care Indicator with Sub-Indicator of Affection with Book of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education for Grade V

The value of compassion is reflected in the teachings of *Rahmatan lil Alamin*, which states that Islam is a mercy for all creation. This concept teaches us to always pay attention and care for the welfare and happiness of other human beings and creatures of Allah. Meanwhile, in character education, compassion is taught as loving, feeling, and appreciating others and providing support and attention to others. It can be done through a sympathetic and empathetic attitude, which can help students understand and feel the feelings and needs of others and provide positive support and solutions in facing problems.

3.1.2 Strengthening the value of compassion based on the sub-indicator of sympathy

The reinforcement of the value of empathy is based on the sub-indicator of empathy, which, according to the research results, is the second most discussed topic in the Islamic religious education and moral values book for fifth-grade students. The word empathy was found repeated three times in the teacher's book and six times in the student's book and was spread across several sections within the sub-discussion.

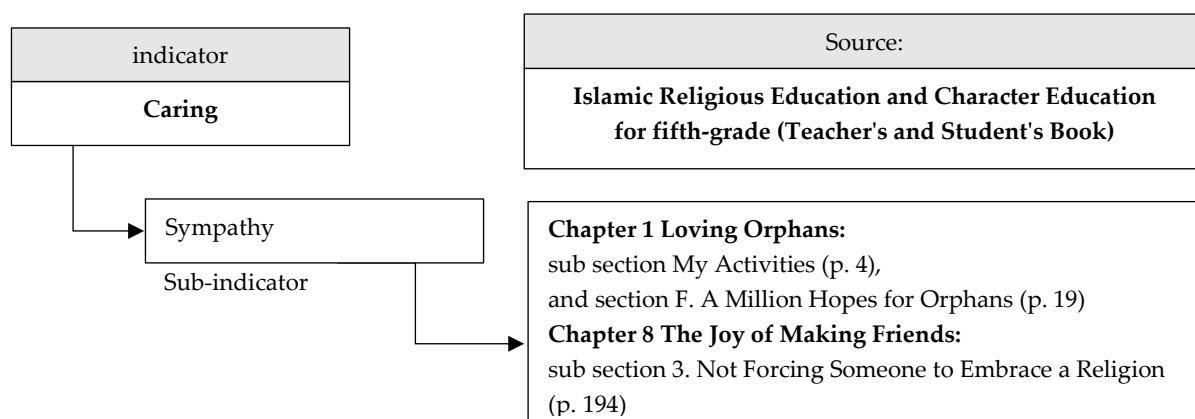


Figure 3. Concept Map of Compatibility of Care Indicator with Sub-Indicator of Sympathy with Book of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education for Grade V

The sympathy sub-indicator is included in two learning chapters in the Islamic Religious Education and Moral Character Education book for fifth-grade students. Chapter one, “Caring for Orphans,” teaches students to always pay attention to the condition of others and to try to help them if possible. Chapter eight, “The Joy of Friendship,” teaches how to make others sympathize with us by respecting the religious freedom of others and demonstrating good character as a Muslim.

In understanding the value of sympathy in the Islamic Religious Education and Moral Character Education book for fifth-grade students (Teacher’s and Student’s Book), the difference between sympathy and empathy is also clearly illustrated in the learning material. Sympathy involves feelings of concern for others who are experiencing difficulties or suffering. Sympathy is a more passive reaction because it does not involve direct understanding and experience from the perspective of the person experiencing the suffering. On the other hand, empathy involves the ability to understand and feel the emotions and perspectives of others, as well as showing concern and support for them.

3.1.3 Strengthening the value of compassion based on the sub-indicator of empathy

Based on the research findings, the empathy sub-indicator occupies the second discussion space in the Islamic Religious Education and Moral Character Education book for fifth-grade students. The word “empathy” is repeated six times in the student book and is spread across several sub-discussions in chapter one, “Caring for Orphans.”

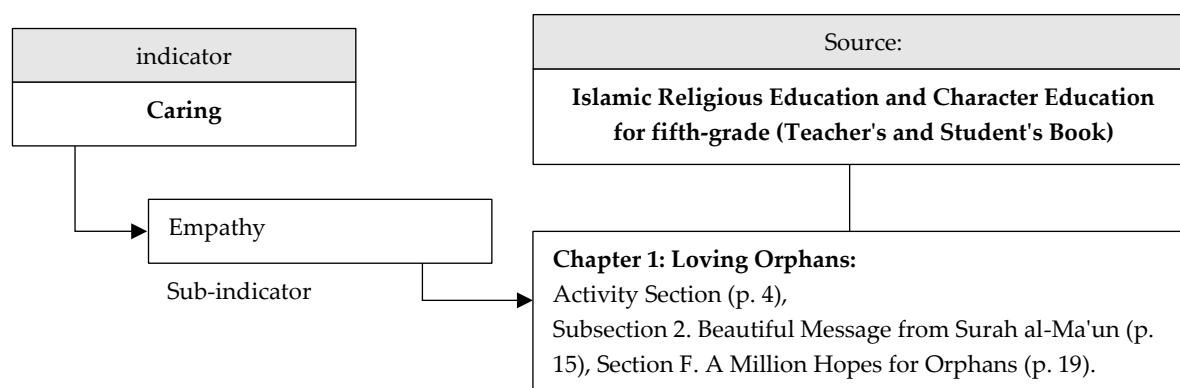


Figure 4. Concept Map of Compatibility of Care Indicator with Sub-Indicator of Empathy with Book of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education for Grade V

Empathy involves a deep understanding of how someone feels and reacts in certain situations, and it involves more active actions in providing support and assistance to that person. In learning, sympathy can provide motivation and concern for classmates experiencing difficulties, but empathy is more important because it involves a deep understanding and active interaction to help classmates experiencing difficulties. With good empathy skills, students can build healthy relationships with others and participate positively in society.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 Strengthening caring values based on the sub-indicator of affection

Based on the research findings presented earlier, strengthening the value of caring in learning is very important because it positively impacts student character development and attitudes. When learning emphasizes caring, students learn to have more empathetic attitudes and behaviors and care for themselves, others, the environment, and society. They also learn to work together with others, accept differences, be responsible, have courage, appreciate the environment, treat everyone fairly, and develop social concern. Strengthening the value of compassion through the sub-indicator of affection is essential for creating a nurturing and supportive environment. Affectionate gestures, such as kind words, warm smiles, and physical touch (when appropriate), can profoundly impact students' emotional well-being and engagement in learning. When educators show genuine care and affection for their students, it establishes a sense of belonging and security, enabling students to feel safe to express themselves, take risks, and actively participate in classroom activities (Isgandarova, 2012). In addition, this nurturing environment fosters a deep connection between students and educators, leading to enhanced learning outcomes and personal growth.

Affection in learning helps cultivate positive and healthy relationships between educators and students. When educators express affection towards their students, they create a bond built on trust, respect, and genuine care. This bond encourages students to seek guidance and support, knowing their educators are approachable and compassionate. In addition, educators instill a sense of self-worth and confidence in students through acts of affection, such as offering encouragement, celebrating achievements, and providing constructive feedback with kindness. This emotional support empowers students to take ownership of their learning, overcome challenges, and develop resilience.

The presence of affection in the learning environment also enhances social and emotional development among students. When educators model and promote affectionate behavior, it sets a positive example for students to emulate in their interactions with peers. Affection cultivates a sense of empathy, understanding, and compassion among students, fostering a classroom community where kindness and support thrive. Students learn to appreciate and value the feelings and needs of others, creating a harmonious and inclusive learning environment (Wahyuddin et al., 2022). Furthermore, affectionate gestures create a positive atmosphere that promotes positive behavior, cooperation, and collaboration, contributing to a more enriching and fulfilling learning experience for all. Integrating affection into the learning process strengthens the value of compassion by fostering a nurturing and supportive environment, building positive relationships, and promoting social and emotional development. Affectionate acts from educators create a sense of belonging, inspire students' confidence, and encourage empathy and kindness among peers. By prioritizing affection in educational settings, we create spaces where students can thrive academically, emotionally, and socially, paving the way for their overall growth and success.

3.2.1 Strengthening the value of compassion based on the sub-indicator of sympathy

Schools and teachers must strengthen the value of care in the learning process to facilitate students' positive growth and development. By emphasizing the importance of care in learning, students can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become individuals with strong, honest, and responsible characters (Chowdhury, 2018; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Strengthening the value of compassion in learning environments through the sub-indicator of sympathy is crucial for fostering student empathy

and understanding. Sympathy involves recognizing and acknowledging the emotions and struggles of others, which plays a significant role in creating a compassionate classroom atmosphere. When educators cultivate an environment where students feel supported and understood, it promotes a sense of community and encourages students to be more open and empathetic toward their peers (Van Schie et al., 2011). By incorporating activities and discussions that encourage sympathy and empathy, educators help students develop a deeper appreciation for the experiences and perspectives of others, fostering a culture of compassion and kindness.

Sympathy in learning environments also facilitates the development of strong social and emotional skills. When students experience sympathy from their educators and peers, they learn to recognize and validate the emotions of others. This understanding promotes the growth of emotional intelligence, allowing students to navigate complex social situations with empathy and compassion (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). As students develop the ability to sympathize with their classmates, they are more likely to form positive and meaningful relationships, engage in effective communication, and work collaboratively. These skills contribute to a supportive learning environment and prepare students for success in their personal and professional lives.

Sympathy-based learning environments also positively impact student well-being and academic performance. When students feel seen and understood by their educators and classmates, it creates a sense of psychological safety and reduces feelings of isolation. It, in turn, improves student engagement, motivation, and overall satisfaction with the learning process. By prioritizing sympathy, educators can address the diverse emotional needs of students, providing necessary support and guidance to navigate academic challenges. As a result, students feel empowered to take risks, seek help when needed, and develop a growth mindset, leading to improved learning outcomes and personal growth (Alannasir, 2020). Strengthening the value of compassion through the sub-indicator of sympathy in learning environments cultivates empathy, enhances social-emotional skills, and improves student well-being and academic performance. By fostering a culture of sympathy, educators create a safe and inclusive space where students feel understood, supported, and valued. It will promote the development of essential skills for positive relationships, effective communication, and collaboration, ultimately preparing students to become compassionate and empathetic members of society.

3.2.2 Strengthening the value of compassion based on the sub-indicator of empathy

In a learning environment, strengthening the value of compassion through the sub-indicator of empathy is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive space for students (Khusaini et al., 2020). Empathy allows educators to understand and relate to their students' emotions, experiences, and challenges (Chismar, 1988; Meyers et al., 2019; Wink et al., 2021; Zhou Dr, 2022). By actively listening and acknowledging students' perspectives, educators can build trusting relationships that empower students to be authentic (Menezes et al., 2021). This empathetic approach promotes a sense of belonging and fosters a compassionate learning community where students feel seen, heard, and valued (David & Dobson, 2020). When educators demonstrate empathy towards their students, it cultivates a culture of compassion. Educators can offer support and guidance beyond academic development by recognizing and validating students' emotions and struggles (Baderiah & Ilham, 2015; Caldarella et al., 2023; Meyers et al., 2019). Compassionate educators understand that each student has unique needs and circumstances and strive to create personalized learning experiences considering these factors (Hella & Wright, 2009). By tailoring teaching strategies and providing individualized attention, educators strengthen the value of compassion by promoting students' overall well-being and growth.

Empathy in education goes beyond the student-teacher relationship and encourages peer empathy (Meyers et al., 2019). By incorporating empathy-building activities and discussions into the curriculum, educators can nurture students' ability to understand and relate to one another's perspectives. It will help students develop important social and emotional skills, such as active listening, conflict resolution, and teamwork. In addition, when students learn to empathize with their peers, they become more

compassionate and supportive, creating a positive and inclusive learning environment where everyone feels valued and respected. Overall, strengthening the value of compassion through empathy in learning environments fosters a sense of belonging, supports individual growth, and cultivates a culture of understanding and acceptance.

In addition, by prioritizing empathy in education, we equip students with essential skills for building positive relationships, navigating challenges, and positively impacting their communities. By implementing caring values in learning, students are expected to gain meaningful, useful, and relevant learning experiences that meet their needs and potential. In addition, it will help students develop the skills and abilities needed to face life's challenges in the future. The materials in Islamic religious education and character education can strengthen caring values (love, empathy, and sympathy). Strengthening caring values within Islamic religious education and character development brings diverse student benefits. First and foremost, this approach enhances the quality of students' personalities by instilling positive attributes such as empathy, tolerance, responsibility, honesty, and environmental awareness. These values contribute to the holistic development of individuals, fostering a sense of ethical responsibility and consideration for others.

Additionally, students with strong, caring values exhibit improved social skills, making them more adaptable to diverse social environments and effective collaborators in fostering positive interpersonal relationships. It not only enriches their interactions but also equips them with essential skills for navigating the complexities of societal dynamics.

Moreover, the infusion of caring values contributes to developing religious awareness, as emphasized in Islamic religious education. By emphasizing care for fellow human beings and the environment, students develop a deeper understanding and connection to their religious beliefs, integrating ethical principles into their worldview.

In enhancing the cultivation of caring values within Islamic religious and moral education, educators can adopt specific strategies to impart these values effectively to their students. Firstly, educators can focus on teaching the value of caring for the environment. It involves instructing students on responsible practices, such as proper waste disposal and methods for planting trees and nurturing plants.

Secondly, employing teaching methods that actively encourage caring is crucial. Educators can design assignments that necessitate collaboration and the consideration of common interests, fostering a sense of care and responsibility among students. Furthermore, teachers can play a pivotal role in teaching the value of caring for others. It encompasses instructing students on how to extend assistance to a friend in need or empathize with those less fortunate, instilling a compassionate mindset. In addition to theoretical instruction, setting a real-life example is paramount. Teachers can exemplify the importance of caring for others by actively demonstrating acts of kindness, such as aiding a friend in need or emphasizing the significance of respecting differences and avoiding discrimination.

Lastly, educators can reinforce caring behavior by appreciating and acknowledging students who exhibit such qualities. Offering praise or rewards for actions demonstrating care for the environment or others serves as positive reinforcement, encouraging students to continue manifesting caring behavior in both environmental and interpersonal contexts. Educators can effectively instill and reinforce the value of care in their students' learning journey through a combination of instructional strategies and personal example-setting. Teaching the value of caring for other living beings. Teachers can teach students to care for other living beings, such as caring for pets or showing compassion towards animals.

4. CONCLUSION

The research findings illuminate the pivotal role of fortifying the value of caring within the educational journey, significantly influencing students' character development and attitudes. The research cultivates empathetic attitudes and behaviors by accentuating caring values, specifically

through the sub-indicators of affection, sympathy, and empathy, embedding in students a profound sense of responsibility, courage, and social concern. The researcher draws compelling conclusions from these findings: Firstly, integrating the sub-indicator of affection into the learning process, especially within a nurturing environment, enhances students' emotional well-being, engagement, and interpersonal relationships. By prioritizing compassion and affection, educators foster an inclusive and nurturing learning atmosphere, facilitating holistic student growth and preparing them to emerge as empathetic, responsible, and compassionate members of society. Secondly, emphasizing the sub-indicator of sympathy in learning environments fosters empathy and contributes to social-emotional development and enhanced academic performance. Establishing a compassionate culture within schools creates a supportive and inclusive space, empowering students to excel academically and personally. This method underscores the value of compassion, contributing comprehensively to students' development and preparing them to assume roles as empathetic and responsible individuals in society. Lastly, prioritizing the sub-indicator of empathy in learning environments proves indispensable for crafting a supportive and inclusive space for students. Educators demonstrating empathy build trusting relationships, fostering a compassionate learning community. Teachers promote well-being and progress by validating students' emotions and needs and developing peer empathy and social-emotional skills. Empathy creates a welcoming, respectful learning atmosphere that boosts student engagement and personal growth. Six strategies can help instructors strengthen caring values: 1) teaching caring values for the environment; 2) giving students tangible examples; 3) using teaching methods that encourage caring attitudes; 4) teaching caring values for fellow students; 5) recognising and appreciating caring behaviour; and 6) teaching caring for other living things. These coordinated efforts create a learning environment that promotes student care.

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