

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SHAPING THE CHARACTER OF LAW STUDENTS

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ABSTRAK

Keywords:

*Religious Education.
character formation,
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This study examines the role of Religious Education in shaping the character of law students, emphasizing the urgent need for them to acquire not only intellectual competence but also moral integrity grounded in religious values. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with data collected through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving students and lecturers of Religious Education courses. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, including reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation applied to ensure validity. The findings show that Religious Education significantly contributes to four key values: honesty, responsibility, justice, and multicultural awareness. Honesty underpins academic and professional integrity, while responsibility develops discipline and accountability. Justice provides an ethical orientation beyond formal law, and multicultural awareness fosters tolerance and inclusivity. Together, these values form the ethical foundation required for integrity-based legal professionalism. This research highlights that Religious Education is not merely a normative subject but a transformative instrument for character formation. It suggests that Religious Education curricula should be systematically integrated with legal ethics, multiculturalism, and contemporary challenges to prepare law graduates who are not only intellectually competent but also morally grounded professionals.

Kata Kunci:

*Pendidikan Agama,
Pembentukan Karakter,
Mahasiswa Hukum*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran Pendidikan Agama dalam membentuk karakter mahasiswa hukum, dengan menekankan pentingnya bagi mereka untuk memiliki tidak hanya kompetensi intelektual, tetapi juga integritas moral yang berlandaskan nilai-nilai keagamaan. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan mahasiswa serta dosen pengampu mata kuliah Pendidikan Agama. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan, dengan triangulasi untuk menjamin keabsahan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Pendidikan

Agama berkontribusi signifikan terhadap pembentukan empat nilai utama: kejujuran, tanggung jawab, keadilan, dan kesadaran multikultural. Kejujuran menjadi dasar integritas akademik dan profesional, sedangkan tanggung jawab menumbuhkan disiplin serta akuntabilitas. Keadilan memberikan orientasi etis yang melampaui hukum formal, sementara kesadaran multikultural menumbuhkan sikap toleransi dan inklusivitas. Keempat nilai tersebut secara bersama-sama membentuk landasan etis bagi profesionalisme hukum yang berintegritas. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa Pendidikan Agama bukan sekadar mata kuliah normatif, melainkan instrumen transformatif dalam pembentukan karakter. Oleh karena itu, kurikulum Pendidikan Agama perlu diintegrasikan secara sistematis dengan etika hukum, multikulturalisme, dan tantangan kontemporer, guna mempersiapkan lulusan hukum yang tidak hanya cakap secara intelektual, tetapi juga berakar kuat pada nilai-nilai moral.

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Introduction

The development of higher education in the field of law not only emphasizes the mastery of intellectual and professional competencies but also the cultivation of moral integrity based on religious values. In recent years, various studies have highlighted the importance of character education as a fundamental aspect of preparing future legal professionals. Research by Nucci & Narvaez (2014) emphasizes that character formation through education is closely related to the development of honesty, responsibility, and justice—values that are essential for law students who will later work in contexts demanding ethical accountability. Previous studies on religious education in universities also indicate its strategic role in strengthening students' ethical perspectives. For example, studies conducted by Hidayat (2018) and Rahmawati (2020) show that

religious education contributes to shaping students' awareness of justice and responsibility, thereby reducing tendencies toward unethical academic or professional practices. These findings are in line with global discourse that views religious-based character education as a key factor in producing professionals with integrity.

The importance of this research lies in the urgent need for law students not only to be intellectually capable but also to embody values of honesty, responsibility, and justice. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of religious education in shaping the character of law students, particularly in providing an ethical foundation for their future professionalism. The contribution of this research is to provide an academic perspective that encourages the integration of religious education more systematically into the higher education curriculum and learning activities, so that law students are prepared not only as competent graduates but also as professionals with strong moral integrity. Religious education has long been recognized as a key factor in shaping students' moral and ethical awareness within higher education. According to Lickona (1996), character education must emphasize moral principles such as honesty, integrity, and justice to create ethically responsible citizens. In this sense, religious education functions not only as a transmission of religious doctrine but also as a platform for cultivating moral reasoning and social responsibility. Nucci and Narvaez (2014) argue that moral and character education, when integrated into professional programs, can guide students toward ethical decision-making, which is crucial in professions such as law where moral dilemmas frequently arise.

Several scholars have highlighted the transformative nature of religious education in universities. Hidayat (2018) observed that religious instruction helps students develop ethical awareness and self-discipline, reducing tendencies toward academic misconduct. Similarly, Rahmawati (2020) found that integrating religious values into the university curriculum enhances students' sense of justice and responsibility toward society. These findings support the argument that religious education contributes significantly to internalizing ethical norms, which in turn foster a sense of moral accountability among students, particularly those preparing for careers in law and governance. The relationship between religious education and honesty as a core virtue has also been emphasized in

character education literature. Arthur (2014) points out that professional integrity is inseparable from the cultivation of honesty and moral courage during academic formation. In the context of law students, such internalization is fundamental since legal practice demands truthfulness and adherence to ethical codes. Religious education provides structured opportunities for students to reflect on honesty from spiritual and philosophical perspectives, enabling them to link personal belief with professional ethics. Responsibility is another essential dimension nurtured through religious education. Carr (2008) and Samani & Hariyanto (2011) both underline that education aiming at virtue must instill responsibility as an enduring disposition. Through the study of religious teachings and ethical case discussions, students learn that responsibility extends beyond personal obligations—it encompasses social accountability and respect for justice. This is particularly relevant for law students, whose professional success depends not only on technical competence but also on their commitment to upholding justice and serving the public good. Justice, as discussed in multiple religious and philosophical frameworks, provides a crucial moral orientation for future legal professionals. Ichwan (2001) and Nucci & Narvaez (2014) both affirm that religious-based education cultivates an understanding of justice not merely as legal compliance but as a moral and spiritual virtue. Religious education thereby offers a broader ethical lens that complements formal legal reasoning. Law students exposed to such perspectives are more likely to perceive justice as a value grounded in human dignity and compassion, reinforcing the ethical purpose of law beyond procedural correctness.

In addition to moral virtues, religious education also promotes multicultural awareness and tolerance. Tilaar (2004) and Suyatno et al. (2020) assert that integrating multicultural and religious education helps students appreciate diversity and practice inclusivity. For law students, this is particularly significant because legal practice often involves navigating cultural differences and protecting human rights. By understanding religious pluralism and ethical relativism, students become more capable of engaging constructively in diverse environments, aligning with the modern legal system's emphasis on equality and social harmony. Overall, previous research consistently demonstrates that religious education plays a strategic role in forming students' moral character, ethical reasoning, and multicultural sensibility. It serves as a transformative element that links academic learning with moral consciousness, shaping students to become

professionals with integrity and social awareness. This literature underscores that for law students, religious education is not a peripheral or merely normative course—it is an integral part of character formation that prepares them to uphold justice, honesty, and responsibility in both personal and professional life.

METODOLOGI

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore in depth the role of Religious Education in shaping the character of law students at Universitas PGRI Mpu Sindok Nganjuk. The qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of values, meanings, and lived experiences related to honesty, responsibility, justice, and multicultural awareness among students and lecturers. The case study method enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon in its real-life context and to provide a comprehensive description of the educational practices within the Law Program. The study involved 10 law students and 2 Religious Education lecturers selected through purposive sampling based on their active participation in Religious Education courses and their willingness to provide detailed insights. The Law Program at Universitas PGRI Mpu Sindok Nganjuk was selected because it represents a context where moral and ethical formation is crucial for professional identity development. The Religious Education course in this program emphasizes both cognitive understanding of religious values and their practical implementation in legal ethics.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: In-depth interviews with students and lecturers to explore perceptions and experiences related to the moral and character-forming aspects of Religious Education; Participant observation in Religious Education classes to document interaction patterns, classroom dynamics, and moral reflection activities; and Document analysis, including course syllabi, lesson plans, and institutional guidelines, to understand how character values are embedded in the curriculum.

These multiple data sources ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and enabled triangulation across different forms of evidence. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three main

stages: Data reduction — selecting and simplifying relevant information based on research questions; Data display — organizing the data into thematic categories and matrices to identify relationships among key concepts; and Conclusion drawing and verification — developing interpretations and verifying findings by comparing data across sources.

The analysis followed a thematic coding process, where interview transcripts and field notes were coded according to emerging themes such as honesty, responsibility, justice, and tolerance. Patterns and relationships among these themes were then identified to explain how Religious Education contributes to students' moral and professional development.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that Religious Education plays a transformative role in shaping the moral and ethical character of law students. It is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but functions as an internalization process through which students learn to embody values such as honesty, responsibility, justice, and multicultural awareness. These moral dimensions are not abstract ideals but practical competencies that prepare students to navigate ethical dilemmas in academic and professional settings. This result aligns with Lickona's (1996) argument that character education must emphasize the habituation of moral behavior rather than the mere teaching of moral concepts.

The increased awareness of honesty among students, as observed through reduced academic misconduct and improved integrity in coursework, supports the findings of Hidayat (2018) and Arthur (2014). Both scholars emphasize that professional education must cultivate moral responsibility to prevent ethical erosion within professional practice. In the legal field, honesty serves as a fundamental principle of justice and credibility. Hence, Religious Education provides students with an ethical lens to view truth as a moral commitment rather than a strategic choice. The process of reflection during Religious Education classes enables students to connect their spiritual beliefs with academic and professional integrity.

Responsibility emerged as another crucial outcome of Religious Education. Students demonstrated stronger discipline in meeting academic obligations, consistent

participation, and accountability in group work. This finding resonates with Carr's (2008) concept of virtue ethics, which views responsibility as the foundation of moral maturity and civic virtue. Through Religious Education, law students not only recognize their duties as learners but also internalize responsibility as a lifelong professional attitude. This transformation indicates that moral instruction, when delivered through experiential and reflective learning, can effectively strengthen legal professionalism.

Justice, as both a moral and legal value, was also found to be significantly influenced by Religious Education. Students began to interpret justice not merely as a formal legal standard but as a universal moral principle grounded in compassion and equality. This interpretation corresponds with the perspectives of Nucci and Narvaez (2014), who argue that moral education rooted in religious understanding deepens students' moral reasoning and their ability to apply ethical principles in real-life decision-making. Religious Education thus becomes an essential space for law students to engage with justice as a human virtue — one that transcends procedural legality and speaks to the moral conscience of society.

Another vital contribution of Religious Education lies in fostering multicultural awareness and tolerance. Given that law students are expected to serve in diverse social environments, the ability to respect pluralism is an indispensable competence. This finding supports the views of Tilaar (2004) and Suyatno et al. (2020), who emphasize that multicultural and value-based education strengthens students' empathy and intercultural understanding. Within the setting of Universitas PGRI Mpu Sindok Nganjuk, where students come from various cultural and religious backgrounds, Religious Education functions as a unifying medium that cultivates harmony, respect, and mutual understanding among future legal practitioners.

Contextually, these findings also reveal the strategic importance of Religious Education in private university settings, where students often have diverse socio-religious orientations and differing moral perspectives. The integration of Religious Education within the legal curriculum helps bridge these differences by promoting shared ethical values. It provides a moral compass that guides law students to interpret justice through both spiritual and rational dimensions. This dual orientation—ethical and intellectual—positions Religious

Education as a critical component in developing humanistic and integrity-based legal professionals.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the results imply that Religious Education should be designed not as a normative or dogmatic subject, but as a reflective, dialogical, and case-based learning process. Integrating real-life ethical issues and legal dilemmas into Religious Education courses would enhance students' critical moral reasoning. Such integration echoes the recommendations of Suyatno et al. (2020), who advocate for character education models that engage students actively through reflection and social interaction. Therefore, the study highlights the need for universities to redesign Religious Education curricula that are both context-sensitive and interdisciplinary, linking moral theory with legal ethics.

Although this research was conducted in a limited context involving one university and a small number of participants, it nonetheless provides valuable insight into how Religious Education can influence the moral formation of law students. Future studies could expand this research by incorporating comparative analyses across universities or including quantitative measurements of character outcomes. Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the growing discourse on value-based legal education and underscores the urgency of moral reinforcement within professional training programs.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Religious Education plays a pivotal and transformative role in shaping the moral and professional character of law students. The results reveal that Religious Education is not merely a theoretical or normative subject but serves as an ethical formation process that integrates moral understanding with legal professionalism. Through its learning activities, it cultivates four essential values—honesty, responsibility, justice, and multicultural awareness—which together form the ethical foundation of integrity-based legal practice. By fostering honesty and responsibility, Religious Education strengthens students' self-discipline and moral accountability; by promoting justice and multicultural sensitivity, it prepares them to uphold fairness, empathy, and tolerance within both legal and social contexts. These findings affirm the relevance of moral and character education theories proposed by Lickona (1996), Carr (2008), and Nucci & Narvaez (2014), emphasizing that value-based learning in higher education can

effectively bridge intellectual competence and moral consciousness. From a practical standpoint, the study suggests that Religious Education in law faculties should be designed as an integrative and reflective course that connects religious values with legal ethics, civic responsibility, and intercultural understanding. Although this research was limited to one institution with a small number of participants, it offers meaningful insight into how Religious Education contributes to character formation in professional education. In the long term, strengthening Religious Education in law programs will help produce graduates who are not only intellectually capable but also morally upright, socially empathetic, and committed to upholding justice and humanity in their professional practice.

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