

The Representation of Religious Values as Character Education Messages in the Song “Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali”

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ABSTRACT

Character education in contemporary educational discourse extends beyond cognitive attainment to include value orientation, moral attitudes, and spiritual awareness. Within this context, symbolic media such as songs play an important role in engaging affective and cultural dimensions. This study examines the representation of religious values as character education messages in the song “Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali,” a symbolic element of *Ma’had al-Jāmi‘ah* at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. This study employs a qualitative text-centered design using qualitative content analysis integrated with thematic analysis. The analysis is guided by character education theory and Islamic ethical perspectives. The data consist of the complete song lyrics, analyzed through coding, categorization, and interpretive meaning construction. Analytical rigor was ensured through theoretical triangulation, peer debriefing, and iterative coding verification. The findings identify five core values: devotion-oriented religiosity, appreciation of knowledge as a spiritual value, sincerity and dedication, moral struggle (*jihad*) as an ethical ethos, and social morality reflected in the concept of *ulul albab*. These values are constructed through symbolic and affective language, positioning the song as a medium for implicit value internalization. The study indicates that institutional song lyrics function as symbolic discourse through which religious values are organized and communicated, highlighting the role of affective-cultural media in character education.



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A. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational discourse, character education is increasingly understood as an integral dimension of educational goals, extending beyond cognitive achievement to include the development of moral attitudes, value orientations, and social responsibility. Within this framework, religious values play a central role in shaping ethical principles and guiding behavior, thereby strengthening both religious identity and social virtues such as discipline, responsibility, and care for others. Empirical studies further indicate that music-based learning contributes to the development of discipline and responsibility as key components of character education (Sagala, 2024).

The internalization of character values, however, does not occur solely through formal instruction. Research suggests that values are more effectively embedded through symbolic media present in students’ everyday experiences. Among these, songs function as affective-symbolic media through which values are conveyed and internalized via emotional engagement and repetition. Even simple lyrics, when repeatedly experienced in meaningful contexts, can foster moral qualities such as respect and empathy (Survia, 2025). This role is further reinforced

by findings that music education promotes moral awareness, responsibility, and collaborative attitudes, highlighting its function as a value-oriented pedagogical medium (Audhyati, A., & Sayuti, 2024).

Recent scholarship underscores the pedagogical potential of music in character education, particularly due to its ability to engage affective and symbolic dimensions that are less accessible through formal teaching. Studies show that music enables values to be experienced emotionally and repeatedly, thereby strengthening internalization (Chung, 2023)(Julia, J., Supriyadi, T., & Iswara, 2022) (Ho, 2025). In addition, music learning has been linked to students' psychological development, including self-esteem and emotional engagement, which are closely related to character formation (Jiang, X., & Tong, 2025). Similarly, research on traditional songs demonstrates that lyrics can embody values such as religiosity, discipline, and responsibility, functioning as culturally grounded sources of moral internalization (Lubis et al., 2025). The effectiveness of music in this process is closely associated with its emotional dimension, as it enhances affective engagement and supports value internalization (Váradi et al., 2024).

Despite these advances, existing studies largely focus on popular songs, primary education, or general music pedagogy, leaving institutional religious songs in Islamic higher education underexplored. In particular, limited attention has been given to how institutional song lyrics function as structured carriers of religious values within Ma'had al-Jāmi'ah environments. This gap indicates the need to examine institutional cultural texts as potential media of character education. Studies on cultural media further suggest that symbolic forms function effectively in value internalization, supporting the relevance of analyzing institutional songs within this framework (Junaidi et al., 2024).

Within the Islamic educational tradition, particularly in Ma'had al-Jāmi'ah as university-based Islamic boarding environments, institutional songs often serve functions beyond ceremonial expression. They articulate institutional visions of moral and spiritual formation while reinforcing collective identity. The song "Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali," associated with the Ma'had of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, reflects themes of devotion, reverence for knowledge, moral refinement, and commitment to Qur'anic values. It can therefore be understood not only as an institutional symbol but also as a cultural text conveying character education messages. From a theoretical perspective, music education integrates emotional experience with learning processes, strengthening its role in value transmission (Chen, D., Wu, Y., & Chen, 2024).

The urgency of this study lies in the need to identify alternative pedagogical media that support the internalization of character values in higher education, particularly within religious institutions where symbolic and cultural dimensions are central. Without systematic analysis, the pedagogical potential of institutional cultural texts such as songs remains underutilized.

This study contributes conceptually and methodologically by positioning institutional song lyrics as a form of religious discourse and analyzing them through qualitative content analysis integrated with thematic analysis. It focuses on how religious values are symbolically constructed, organized, and communicated through linguistic and thematic structures. Furthermore, this study highlights the interrelationship between symbolic language, religious values, and character education, emphasizing that language functions not only as a representational medium but also as a constitutive force in shaping moral orientation.

This research adopts a text-centered approach, examining the meanings embedded in the song lyrics and their relevance within a character education framework. By analyzing an institutional song as a cultural text, the study positions songs as symbolic pedagogical media capable of shaping moral awareness and reinforcing religious atmosphere in educational settings.

Based on this background, the study aims to describe the representation of religious values in the song "Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali" and to explain how these values can be understood within a character education framework.

B. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design with a text-centered orientation. The research object—the lyrics of the song “*Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*”—is approached as a cultural and symbolic text, enabling the interpretation of religious values embedded within its linguistic structure. The study adopts an interpretive perspective and does not involve empirical procedures such as interviews, surveys, or observations, focusing instead on the construction of textual meaning within its institutional and socio-cultural context.

Methodologically, the study applies qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019), integrated with thematic analysis (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2021). These approaches guide the identification of meaning units, coding of symbolic expressions, and the development of thematic categories representing religious character values. Within this framework, the song lyrics are treated as a form of institutional religious discourse.

The theoretical lens of this study is grounded in character education theory and Islamic ethical thought, particularly drawing on Thomas Lickona’s framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions in character formation (Lickona, 1991), as well as Al-Ghazali’s concept of *akhlāq* (moral character), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah al-nafs*), which highlights the role of inner purification and intention in guiding ethical conduct (Al-Ghazali, 2005). These frameworks serve as the primary analytical references for interpreting how religious values are symbolically constructed and organized within the text.

The primary data consist of the complete song lyrics as the main textual corpus, focusing on words, phrases, and sentences that convey religious expressions and moral orientations. Secondary data include relevant literature on character education and Islamic pedagogy.

Data were collected through documentation and analyzed through iterative close reading to identify patterns of meaning, symbolic expressions, and recurring motifs. The analysis followed five stages: (1) familiarization through repeated reading; (2) initial coding of meaning units using both inductive and deductive approaches; (3) code classification into broader categories; (4) theme construction; and (5) interpretation within the framework of character education.

Through this process, five thematic categories were generated: (1) religiosity and devotion-oriented values, (2) appreciation of knowledge as a spiritual value, (3) sincerity and dedication, (4) moral struggle (*jihad*) as a character ethos, and (5) social morality oriented toward the formation of *ulul albab*. These themes were derived through iterative comparison between coded data and theoretical constructs.

To ensure credibility, the study employed theoretical triangulation, peer debriefing, and iterative coding verification to maintain consistency between data and interpretation. These procedures enhance analytical rigor and support the trustworthiness of the findings.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Religious Value Findings

The thematic content analysis of the lyrics of “*Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*” demonstrates that the song embodies religious values functioning as a medium for character formation within the Ma’had. Beyond serving as a marker of institutional identity, the lyrics construct a coherent moral–spiritual narrative integrating the pursuit of knowledge, ethical cultivation, and devotion-oriented commitment.

The coding process resulted in five principal thematic categories: (1) religiosity and devotion-centered orientation, (2) appreciation of knowledge as a spiritual value, (3) sincerity and dedication, (4) moral struggle (*jihad*) as a character ethos, and (5) social morality oriented toward the formation of *insan ulul albab*.

Importantly, these values are not merely presented as cognitive messages but are symbolically organized through poetic language, repetition, and affective expressions that

enable emotional engagement. This indicates that the song operates not only as a representational text but also as an affective medium that supports value internalization within the Ma'had environment.

1) Religiosity and Devotion-Oriented Life

The dominant theme in the song is religiosity, reflected through symbolic imagery of sacred space and devotional practices:

“Di sudut-sudut rumah-Nya/In the corners of His house”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali*, Stanza 1, line 4)

The phrase *His house* symbolically represents a sacred educational environment in which spiritual formation occurs. This meaning is reinforced in:

“Ayat-ayat suci didendangkan /The holy verses are chanted”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali*, stanza 2, line 1)

These expressions construct a spiritual atmosphere in which religious values are experienced as part of everyday life. The phrase *“rumah-Nya”* signifies not only a physical setting but also a symbolic space of moral formation grounded in divine presence. The chanting of sacred verses further reinforces the centrality of the Qur'an as a source of ethical guidance. From the perspective of Lickona's framework, this theme reflects the integration of *moral knowing* and *moral feeling*, where religious understanding is strengthened through emotional attachment to sacred symbols. The repetitive and melodic nature of the song reinforces this process by embedding religious values into students' affective memory, enabling values to be internalized not only cognitively but also emotionally.

This interpretation is consistent with findings by Lubis et al. (2025), which show that religious song lyrics function as symbolic media conveying values such as religiosity, discipline, and responsibility, while facilitating affective internalization (Lubis et al., 2025)

In the Islamic educational tradition, religious character formation integrates personal devotion with social morality grounded in Qur'anic values, aiming to develop knowledgeable and morally responsible individuals (Mulyasa, 2018).

Thus, religiosity in this context is not limited to ritual awareness but functions as an affective orientation shaping ethical sensitivity, moral awareness, and behavioral disposition. The song therefore serves as a symbolic and emotional medium that supports the formation of students' religious character within the Ma'had environment, although this interpretation remains within the scope of textual analysis rather than empirical measurement.

2) Appreciation of Knowledge as a Spiritual Value

Another prominent theme in the lyrics is the appreciation of knowledge as an integral dimension of Islamic religiosity. This is evident in the lines:

“Menjunjung tinggi ilmu Tuhan /Upholding the knowledge of God”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali*, stanza 2, line 3)

“Seni bahasa ditorehkan /The art of language is inscribed”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali*, stanza 2, line 2)

These expressions position knowledge within a spiritual framework, emphasizing that learning is not merely an academic pursuit but also a form of devotion (*ta'abbud*) and a means of drawing closer to God (*taqarrub*). This perspective aligns with Islamic educational thought, particularly Al-Ghazali's view that knowledge should lead to moral refinement and spiritual awareness.

Notably, the expression “*seni bahasa*” introduces an aesthetic and expressive dimension, suggesting that knowledge is experienced not only intellectually but also emotionally. This reflects an integration between cognition and affect, where learners engage with knowledge as a meaningful and value-laden experience rather than as mere memorization. In this sense, language functions as a medium for conveying spiritual meaning and ethical sensitivity (Jannah, 2023).

From the perspective of character education, this theme demonstrates that knowledge contributes to moral formation when it is internalized through both understanding (*moral knowing*) and appreciation (*moral feeling*). In the Ma’had context, such integration is reinforced not only through formal instruction but also through religious practices that cultivate ethical awareness (Jakandar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, institutional songs such as “*Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*” support this process through repetition and emotional engagement, enabling the affective internalization of scholarly and spiritual values (Mahfud, M., & Zahriyah, 2025). This is consistent with the broader aim of religious character education, which emphasizes that knowledge should inspire ethically grounded behavior and social responsibility (Albani, Muhammad, dan Supratama, 2025).

Thus, the appreciation of knowledge as a spiritual value positions learning within the Ma’had not merely as technical achievement but as an integrated process of intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation, supported by both cognitive understanding and affective experience.

3) Sincerity and Devotion

The theme of sincerity (*ikhlas*) emerges as a central ethical value in the song and is expressed through metaphorical language in the refrain:

“*Gerak langkah keikhlasan semuanya /
Menjadi tombak semangat sang pengabdian*”
“*Every step moves in sincerity,
becoming the spear that drives the spirit of devotion*”
(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*, refrain)

Sincerity is portrayed not as a passive inner state but as a dynamic moral force that animates action without self-interest. The metaphor of a “*spear*” frames sincerity as a driving energy that directs ethical commitment and purposeful devotion.

From the perspective of character education, this aligns with Lickona’s concept of *moral motivation*, where actions are guided by internalized values rather than external pressure or reward. The affective strength of this metaphor enhances its pedagogical impact, transforming sincerity into an emotionally resonant concept that encourages ethical commitment and self-regulated moral action.

This interpretation is further supported by Islamic ethical thought, particularly Al-Ghazali’s concept of *ikhlas*, which emphasizes the purification of intention (*niyyah*) and the alignment between inner consciousness and outward action. In this view, sincerity is not limited to ritual intention but extends to all forms of social conduct and devotion.

In educational discourse, sincerity is closely related to intrinsic motivation—the impulse to act based on internal conviction rather than external compulsion (Zakiyah, A., Mu’alimin, 2025). Such motivation is essential in character education, as it fosters moral agency grounded in personal awareness and responsibility.

Moreover, integrating sincerity into learning processes has been shown to strengthen spiritual awareness and ethical responsibility, positioning learning itself as a form of devotion and social service (Zakiyah, A., Mu’alimin, 2025). Institutional songs such as “*Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*” contribute to this process by conveying moral messages through symbolic

and affective language, enabling students to internalize sincerity as both a value and a lived practice (Al-Arif et al., 2025).

Thus, sincerity in this context functions as a core ethical principle that bridges moral understanding (*moral knowing*), emotional commitment (*moral feeling*), and consistent action (*moral action*), reinforcing its central role in Islamic character education.

4) Moral Jihad as an Ethos of Character

The concept of *jihad* in “*Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*” is represented as moral and spiritual striving rather than physical confrontation. This is reflected in the line:

“Wajāhidu fillāhi ḥaqqa jihādihi”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*, refrain)

In this context, *jihad* refers to *jihad al-nafs*, namely the continuous effort to maintain moral integrity through self-discipline, emotional regulation, and consistency in ethical conduct. From the perspective of character education, this aligns with Lickona’s concept of *moral action*, which emphasizes the enactment of moral values through sustained practice and commitment.

This narrative is further reinforced in:

“Gelora jihad mahasantri ahlul jannah”

/ “The surge of jihad among the mahasantri, ahlul jannah”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*, stanza 4, line 4)

The term “*gelora*” introduces a strong affective dimension, indicating emotional intensity, enthusiasm, and inner drive. This suggests that the song not only communicates the value of moral struggle cognitively but also energizes students emotionally to embody it, reinforcing resilience and commitment in character formation.

In Islamic educational thought, *jihad* extends beyond ritual devotion to include sustained effort in upholding moral values and preventing wrongdoing (Kurniawan, 2013). Within this framework, moral striving reflects what can be described as *moral resilience*-the capacity to remain committed to ethical principles amid academic and social challenges.

Furthermore, the phrase “*ahlul jannah*” symbolically represents an ideal moral subject who integrates faith, knowledge, and ethical conduct. Such representations function as aspirational models that shape students’ value orientation through affective engagement and motivational identification (Annisa et al., 2025). Empirical studies also indicate that when values such as moral struggle are internalized through reflective and affective processes, students demonstrate stronger intrinsic motivation to embody them in everyday life (Tarsono et al., 2025).

Thus, the song constructs a pedagogical narrative in which the *mahasantri* is positioned as a moral agent engaged in continuous self-improvement and social contribution. Within this framework, *jihad* functions as a metaphor for the educational journey itself-a sustained moral endeavor that integrates cognitive awareness, emotional commitment, and consistent ethical action in the process of character formation.

5) Social Morality and the Formation of *Ulul Albab*

The integration of knowledge, morality, and devotion as the core of character education is most explicit in the lines:

“Dengan ilmu, dengan akhlak dan pengabdian-Ulul Albab”

/ “With knowledge, with morals and devotion-Ulul Albab”

(Lyrics of *Senandung Ma’had Sunan Ampel al-‘Ali*, stanza 4, lines 2–3)

The concept of *ulul albab* is presented not merely as a theological term but as an ideal character profile embodying the pedagogical aim of Islamic education. In the Qur'anic tradition, *ulul albab* refers to individuals who integrate rational reflection (*tafakkur*), spiritual awareness (*tadzakkur*), and ethical action.

At a thematic level, this category functions as a synthesis of all identified values, indicating that character education in the Ma'had context is inherently holistic, integrating intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions into a unified framework of human development.

The juxtaposition of knowledge (*ilmu*), morality (*akhlak*), and devotion (*pengabdian*) underscores that character education cannot be separated from intellectual development or social practice. Knowledge provides the foundation of understanding (moral knowing), morality shapes ethical sensitivity (moral feeling), and devotion reflects the enactment of values in practice (moral action). This alignment reflects Lickona's integrated model of character formation, in which understanding, emotion, and action are interconnected.

From an affective perspective, *ulul albab* also functions as an aspirational identity that students can emotionally identify with. This symbolic representation strengthens motivational engagement, encouraging students not only to understand values cognitively but also to internalize and embody them in daily life.

In the *Ma'had al-Jāmi'ah* context of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, this concept operates as a pedagogical narrative that orients students' value commitments. The song translates the abstract ideal of *ulul albab* into a lived vision in which mahasantri internalize knowledge reflectively, embody ethical conduct, and express these values through social contribution.

This interpretation is supported by studies showing that integrative character-based learning strengthens moral orientation and social awareness when religious values are connected with character formation (Jakandar et al., 2025). Similarly, contemporary scholarship emphasizes the importance of synthesizing cognitive, moral, and spiritual dimensions as a foundation of educational success (Bahiyah, 2025).

Thus, *ulul albab* in the song signifies an integrated model of character that harmonizes knowledge, moral integrity, and devotion. The institutional song therefore functions not only as a symbolic expression but as a pedagogical medium that reinforces holistic character formation grounded in transcendent values and reflective social engagement.

2. Pedagogical Implications: Song as a Symbolic Medium of Character Education

The findings indicate that "*Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali*" functions not only as an institutional symbol but also as an affective-symbolic pedagogical medium within the Ma'had educational environment. Its primary influence operates within the affective domain, where values are internalized through repetition, emotional resonance, and collective engagement. This supports Lickona's argument that character formation requires not only moral knowing but also moral feeling and moral action, in which emotional attachment plays a crucial role in sustaining ethical behavior.

Unlike formal instruction that tends to emphasize cognitive understanding, the song enables students to experience values emotionally, making them more deeply internalized and potentially more enduring. Through melodic repetition and symbolic language, values such as religiosity, sincerity, moral striving, and social responsibility are not merely understood but felt and embodied. In this sense, the song bridges the gap between moral cognition and moral practice by activating students' emotional engagement with ethical meanings.

Furthermore, the song contributes to several pedagogical processes. First, it reinforces the formation of collective identity, as students engage with shared symbolic expressions that reflect institutional values. Second, it strengthens shared moral commitments through repeated exposure

in communal settings. Third, it supports the cultivation of a moral atmosphere, in which religious values are embedded in everyday experience rather than remaining abstract principles.

This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that songs function as affective media for value internalization. Lubis et al. (2025) demonstrate that song lyrics embody moral values such as religiosity and responsibility (Lubis et al., 2025), while Fauzi et al. (2023) highlight the role of music in enhancing emotional engagement with ethical messages (Fauzi, M. I., & Hamzah, 2023). Similarly, Elme (2021) argues that rhythmic repetition supports long-term moral orientation (Elme, 2021), and Rosyidah et al. (2024) show that symbolic language in Ma'had environments contributes to the construction of religious identity (Rosyidah, I., Nurhadi, & Saleh, 2024). These studies reinforce the argument that music-based symbolic media play a significant role in shaping moral awareness through affective experience.

In this sense, institutional songs can be conceptualized as affective infrastructures of character education, in which symbolic language, emotional engagement, and repetition interact to support the internalization of values. This perspective extends the discourse of character education by highlighting that moral formation is not solely cognitive or instructional, but also cultural, emotional, and experiential in nature.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study demonstrates that the lyrics of “Senandung Ma'had Sunan Ampel al-'Ali” constitute a structured discourse of religious values functioning as a medium of character education within the Ma'had context. The identified values—religiosity, knowledge, sincerity, moral striving, and social ethics—are not isolated elements but form an integrated moral and spiritual framework reflecting the holistic nature of Islamic character formation.

Conceptually, the findings indicate that institutional song lyrics operate not only as representational texts but also as affective-symbolic media of value transmission, where meaning is constructed through the interaction of language, emotion, and repetition. This suggests that character education in Islamic higher education is shaped not only by formal instruction but also by cultural-textual practices that mediate moral experience and collective identity.

This study contributes to character education discourse by positioning institutional songs as part of the affective infrastructure of education, highlighting the role of symbolic language and emotional engagement in shaping students' moral orientation. In doing so, it extends prevailing approaches that emphasize cognitive and curricular dimensions by incorporating cultural and affective perspectives in value internalization.

However, this study is limited to textual analysis and does not examine how these values are received or internalized by students. Future research is therefore recommended to adopt empirical and reception-oriented approaches, including the exploration of students' interpretations, emotional responses, and lived experiences. Comparative studies across different Ma'had contexts may further enrich understanding of how institutional cultural media function in diverse educational settings.

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