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# The Relationship between Critical Thinking Skills and *Akhlaqul Karimah* in Elementary School Students

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## Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between critical thinking skills and the practice of *akhlakul karimah* (noble character) among fifth-grade elementary students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Cokro Aminoto in Ambon, Indonesia. While *akhlakul karimah* is a core objective of Islamic education, the specific role of critical thinking in its development remains underexplored, particularly within the Indonesian primary education context. Using a quantitative approach, this research employed a psychological scale to measure the critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah* of 61 students. The findings indicate that students' *akhlakul karimah* is in a "good" category (mean score of 83.21), while their critical thinking skills are categorized as "fairly good" (mean score of 57.87). A significant positive correlation was found between the two variables ($r=0.331$, $p<0.05$), with critical thinking contributing 10.9% to the students' *akhlakul karimah*. Other factors influence the remaining variance (89.1%). These results suggest that fostering critical thinking is an important, though not exclusive, strategy for enhancing students' moral character. The study's implications highlight the need for educational interventions that integrate critical thinking into moral education curricula to better support the development of noble character in students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Islam is a religion of universal mercy (rahmatan lil 'alamin), a principle established by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who declared his mission as "to perfect noble character" (Thoyyibah, 2023). This pronouncement underscores that morals (akhlak) are not merely a set of rules but a core disposition (karakter) inherent within an individual, enabling them to perform good deeds without extensive premeditation (Krebs, 2000; Limone & Toto, 2022). According to this definition, morality is reflexive because it does not require a conscious thought process before action is taken. Furthermore, noble character is cultivated through repeated behaviors, leading to a state in which virtuous conduct emerges spontaneously from an individual's inner self (Mahwiyah et al., 2023). Given this, the formation of noble morals (*akhlakul karimah*) is the primary objective of Islamic education (Septiani et al., 2024). This pedagogical goal is also explicitly aligned with Indonesia's national educational philosophy, which aims to develop students into individuals who are not only knowledgeable and capable but also possess virtuous morals, thereby becoming responsible and democratic citizens (Herningsih & Agama, 2022).

Despite the clear educational mandate to foster noble character, educators and parents are increasingly concerned about the erosion of moral values among primary school students (Suparno, 2019; Thoyyibah, 2023). This moral degradation is not merely a theoretical issue; it manifests in observable behaviors, such as a lack of respect for authority and a general decline in self-discipline. For instance, interviews with the parents of students at MIS Cokro Aminoto highlighted specific challenges, such as getting their children to pray on time. Parents expressed difficulty in managing their children's daily schedules, a problem exacerbated by the excessive use of digital devices.

Furthermore, field observations have shown that a large number of students are exposed to up to two hours of social media daily (Munthe, 2023), which also serves generic social values at odds with the moral instructions they receive from home and schools. The difficulty with these is that many other moral education systems are based on rote learning and direct instruction and do not develop a deeper level of understanding of ethical principles (Azmin et al., 2024; Meindl et al., 2018). Therefore, students may memorize moral rules but struggle to apply them in more nuanced contingencies of real life. This sharp difference serves to underscore how important it is that we go beyond conventional ways of teaching and consider novel cognitive strategies to translate moral knowledge into successful moral action.

The need for this study comes from the desire for measures and effective actions to address the deterioration of prevailing moral values. Although some studies have found that the role of moral education would be significant (Syaifin, 2022; Thoyyibah, 2023), very few pieces of research have systematically studied

how cognitive skills affect the ethical reasoning of primary schools. What is distinctive about this research is the emphasis on critical thinking as a mechanism for developing *akhlakul karimah*. Critical thinking, which is the key competence for problem solving, becomes very important as students are able to analyze whether it is right or wrong, ought to be owned, or tended (Dwyer et al., 2014; Sholihah & Lastariwati, 2020). Empirical consideration of this relationship goes beyond the normative philosophy of moral education. It provides a novel approach to the cognitive underpinnings of moral conduct, suggesting that students who can think critically about situations, weigh harm, and make independent decisions are more likely to embody ethical virtues in a reconciled and often conflicting world. It is anticipated that the results will offer some empirical evidence for a novel pedagogical structure involving critical thinking in the framework of moral education and hence supply an innovative and useful input into Islamic and national education practices.

This study is theoretically based on the solid structure of critical moral development. For critical thinking, we followed the concept advanced by Robert. Ennis (1989) defines it as "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." This definition is significant in that it conceptualizes critical thinking not merely as general logical operations but rather as a practical and action-oriented skill. Our critical thinking model is based on our previous study (Hasibuan, 2023), which we refer to as a five-stage model of critical thinking, consisting of: (1) identifying and clarifying questions (Arifin et al., 2024; Fuady & Ratnasari, 2008); (2) obtaining information from credible sources by analyzing problems with searching sources of information systematically(Aprisal, 2023). Analyzing data from various sources with critical evaluation of the quality (Matthewson, K, in Fikriyah et al., 2021), showing open-mindedness towards different points of view (Norlita et al., 2016), and drawing conclusions after a reflective process (Mansir et al., 2020). This model is a heuristic devised to analyze students' moral reasoning competence.

At the same time, we used Zurqoni's (2018) model of moral behavior as a holistic model for anklakul karimah. This theory represents virtue in four different aspects: first, toward God (akhlak to Allah), which includes humility, gratitude, and commitment through worship (Ahmad, 2021); second, toward others (akhlak to fellow human beings), comprising respects honesty empathy assistance; third, toward oneself (akhlakt to self) entails internal behavior such as self-control discipline integrity; and fourth, caption character is going beyond towards the natural world that is (akhlaq nature), essentially being responsible for keeping the world of nature intact into which man was born, which position the world belongs too, and how we stand in relation to this position justativieldenatural beaue thapticative (Mustaqim et al., 2025). The articulating thesis is that critical thinking is the cognitive 'engine' through which students can negotiate these four domains,

enabling them to draw on *akhlakul karimah* and make principled and well-reasoned choices among (often conflicting) values.

The main purpose of this study was to explore critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah* among students. The research aims to determine (1) the critical thinking skills of fifth-grade students at MIS Cokro Aminoto, (2) the current level of *akhlakul karimah* among the same group of students, (3) the contribution and significant correlation between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah*, (4) the parental perspectives on critical thinking and morals, and (5) the parental strategies to optimize critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah*.

## METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a field-based design to investigate the relationship between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah* among elementary school students. A quantitative approach was chosen to enable the statistical analysis of numerical data, allowing for the measurement of variables and the determination of the correlation and contribution between them. Specifically, the field-based design was appropriate because the research was conducted in a natural setting at MIS Cokro Aminoto Waiheru, thereby enhancing the ecological validity of the findings by observing and measuring the variables as they existed in the student population.

The population for this study comprised all fifth-grade students from classes A and B at Madrasah Ibtidayah (MIS) Cokro Aminoto in Waiheru, Baguala, Ambon City. The total population comprised 61 students. Given that the population was a manageable size (less than 100), a census sampling technique was utilized, wherein the entire population was included in the sample. Thus, the final sample consisted of 61 students. Before data collection began, strict ethical protocols were followed. Formal permission was obtained from the school administration and the respective class teachers to ensure that the research activities did not disrupt regular academic schedules. Data were collected directly from the students in their classrooms during school hours, with the full knowledge and cooperation of the teachers.

The instruments used for this research were the Critical Thinking Skills Scale and the Akhlakul Karimah Scale, which the researcher developed. The test of critical thinking was developed based on Ennis's (1989) theory of critical thinking and measures five main aspects: (1) problem formulation, (2) problem analysis, (3) information gathering, (4) assumptions and knowledge evaluation, and (5) drawing conclusions. The scale of *akhlakul karimah* refers to the Sh´ar'I scale based on Zurqoni moral theory and includes four dimensions: (1) morality towards Allah, (2) morality towards other people, (3)morality towards oneself, and (4)morality towards the environment (Sari & Nazib, 2023).

The instruments were validated through a rigorous process of face-validation, and reliability was established. The scales were discussed with a group of expert validators, comprising three professors and experts in Islamic Education and Educational Psychology. The validators evaluated the content validity, language clarity, and instrument correlation with theoretical constructs. Some revisions were made to the wording of the questions based on their feedback. The use of the instruments was subsequently test-trialed on a sample of 20 students from another school to establish reliability. Trial tests revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 and 0.89 for the critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah* scale, respectively, verifying high internal consistency of the instruments for use in the main study.

The quantitative aspect of the data gathered was processed using statistical tools supported by SPSS Version 23. The main analysis method used was the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test to find out the magnitude and direction of the linear relationship between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah*. Furthermore, a simple linear regression was performed to find out the percentage of contribution from critical thinking toward *akhlakul karimah*. This statistical method was used to evaluate the significance of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data arising from open-ended questions, in which participants' responses were systematically coded and categorized to identify common themes and illuminate reflections.

## RESULTS

### 1. The Level of Students' Critical Thinking Skills

A descriptive analysis of the students' critical thinking skills is presented in Table 1. Scores were obtained using a critical thinking scale that measured five key aspects based on Ennis's theory. The results indicated that the average score for critical thinking skills was 57.87, with a standard deviation of 4.945.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Critical Thinking Skills

| Variable | Min | Max | Mean | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Critical Thinking Skills | 47 | 68 | 57.87 | 4.945 |

*Source: Subhan's research data, 2023*

This finding is further clarified by the categorization of scores, which places the majority of students in the "Fair" category for critical thinking. As illustrated in the chart below, 36% of the students scored between 55 and 59, indicating a foundational but not fully developed level of critical thinking (CT). A smaller proportion of students (33%) were in the "Good" category, while only 8% were classified as "Very Good." These results suggest that while students possess some critical thinking abilities, there is significant room for improvement, particularly in

their ability to reason and evaluate information, which are the core components of critical thinking.

### 2. The Level of Students' *Akhlakul Karimah*

A descriptive analysis of the students' *akhlakul karimah* is presented in Table 2. Data were collected using a scale that measured the four aspects of noble characters. The findings showed that the average score for *akhlakul karimah* was 83.21, with a standard deviation of 4.619.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics of *Akhlakul Karimah*

| Variable | Min | Max | Mean | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Akhlakul karimah* | 69 | 96 | 83.21 | 4.619 |

*Source: Subhan's research data, 2023*

These descriptive data were strengthened by the categorical breakdown of scores, as presented in the pie chart. The results indicate that the majority of students (33%) fall into the "Good" category, and 30% are in the "Fair" category. The high percentage of students in the "Good" and "Very Good" categories collectively (41%) suggests that the madrasah environment has been relatively successful in fostering a strong moral character. The findings from both variables reveal a notable gap: while students' moral character is generally strong, critical thinking skills that can support and strengthen this character are less developed.

### 3. The Relationship and Contribution of Critical Thinking Skills to *Akhlakul Karimah*

To answer the third research question, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was conducted. The results showed a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.331$) with a significance value ($p = 0.009$). Because the p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah*. This correlation is illustrated in the scatter plot below, which shows a general trend in which higher critical thinking scores correspond to higher *akhlakul karimah* scores.

Furthermore, a simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the percentage contribution of critical thinking to *akhlakul karimah*. The coefficient of determination (R2) was 0.109. This indicates that critical thinking skills contribute to 10.9% of the variation in students' *akhlakul karimah*. The remaining 89.1% were influenced by other factors, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of moral development.

### 4. Parental Perspectives on Critical Thinking and Morals

To provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of these quantitative results, qualitative data from the parent interviews were analyzed. The findings are

presented under two main themes: parents' views on the benefits of critical thinking and their strategies for optimizing these skills.

**a. Parents' Views on the Benefits of Critical Thinking and *Akhlakul Karimah***

Parents identified several key benefits of critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah* for their children, the most frequently reported being:

1) **Knowledge and understanding enhancement:** Parents noted that critical thinking "improves understanding of the material and stimulates children's intellectual growth (R21)." This finding suggests that parents recognize critical thinking as a tool to enhance academic learning beyond simple memorization.
2) **Support for learning activities:** Parents expressed that their children showed "greater enthusiasm for learning about the concept of good morals (R1)." This highlights the link between active cognitive engagement and positive attitudes toward moral education.
3) **Communication tools:** Critical thinking was highlighted as a crucial tool for children to connect with others through communication. Parents reported its importance in enabling their children to communicate effectively with family and friends (R10, R21, and R37), which is essential for developing social skills.

These findings underscore parents' recognition of the holistic benefits of critical thinking, which extends beyond academic performance to include social and personal development.

**b. Parental Strategies to Optimize Critical Thinking and *Akhlakul Karimah***

The qualitative results illustrate what parents do to promote critical thinking and moral behavior in their children, particularly when using digital media. The most frequent tactics were as follows:

1) **Supervision and Guidance**

This approach is regarded as a bedrock for enabling the children to connect with digital content "wisely and critically." Parents vigilantly watch over their children when they are online, providing guidance as they make the journey through cyberspace. Moreover, it is not just a question of locking out harmful items, but rather guiding children toward making well-informed choices. This strategy enables parents to model mentoring in all digital things, allowing children to learn how to question, ponder, and evaluate what they find online.

2) **Limited playtime**

A key tactic is for parents to limit the daily amount of time when children are allowed to use digital media, such as 1–2 hours per day. One salient quote from the study is "We let our children play for approximately 1-2 hours a day after finishing their homework at home. ' After play, children are encouraged to take a nap, something that helps the stress of school,'" (R46). This quote provides evidence for a plan regarding screen time. The dual goal of this approach is to reduce unhealthy exposure to digital media and promote other positive

pursuits, such as relaxation and stress reduction. This should not only be an exercise, but also a lifestyle that allows your child to embrace technology in their lives without letting it take over.

3) **Introduction of moral character Apps**

Parents also use this technology to support a good cause. Others have proactively introduced and promoted applications for the cultivation of ethical dispositions. This approach is based on a nuanced understanding of tech, one that sees parents shift from reactive overseers to proactive educators. By choosing and making available for viewing these morally enriching materials, parents are able to use technology as a way of reinforcing the values they would like their children to develop in a very direct sense--transforming something that could have been a source of distraction into an unusually immediate tool of moral education.

4) **Participating in Content Watching and Providing**

This last strategy emphasizes the importance of parents' monitoring and enabling (or not) the content that their children view. Parents feel very passionately about ensuring that the content is acceptable to their family's morals and values. This is more than just establishing filters; it involves an active, ongoing effort to know what their children are streaming, gaming, and reading online. All this ongoing checking ensures that the digital world becomes a permanent part of their life, providing a positive influence and supporting moral teachings from home.

These findings suggest that parents are not passive bystanders in their children's online experiences. They are media mentors who use a mix of oversight, scheduling, and active content selection to encourage a mix of intellectual know-how and moral character regarding incredibly pervasive digital media. The results provide a strong indication that parents are intentional and strategic in their approach to their children's safe and productive digital consumption.

## 5. Parental Strategies for Enforcing Rules and Play Etiquette

The research revealed a range of parental strategies shaping the ways in which they enforce new rules and play etiquette, focusing on digital device use. The results, per category of questions, demonstrate the indispensable role played by parents in guiding and acting as proactive supervisors towards their son or daughter's digital behaviors. These measures are not just reactive, but span a spectrum of proactive steps that aim to make children disciplined and well-mannered in the digital era.

### a. Setting and Enforcing Time Limits

The most frequent strategy noted in this study was to restrict the use of the play apparatus. This discovery coincides with a wealth of literature discussing parental mediation, noting that restrictive mediation is the foremost way parents

manage their children's screen time use. Parents set clear limits on the amount of time, when, and how devices can be used. This might take the form of a hard time limit (for instance, "30 minutes' worth of tablet time after homework") or specific use windows ("no devices at dinner"). This regimented method allows children to find the routine and breadth they desperately crave without becoming overly engrossed in screen time. It is a straightforward and simple approach that allows children to know what is expected of them without causing confusion or conflict.

**b. Collaborative Rule-Making**

An interesting and subtler approach is to impose agreed-upon time limits on children. This goes beyond just restriction and involves children in the conversation. Encouraging personal responsibility empowers children to take control of their media consumption, fostering an understanding that they share common ground. This co-constructive or active mediation method is especially powerful because children are more likely to comply. When children feel that they are part of the decision-making process, they tend to follow rules. It is also a good opportunity for parents to guide their child through essential values, such as negotiation, communication, compromise, and self-regulation.

**c. Educating on Consequences**

The research points out that nearly half of parents caution children about trouble from excessive screen time. This is all about explaining the negative consequences of too much screen time in a simple, easy-to-understand way. They might talk about eye strain, lagging academic performance, or the social and physical downsides of sedentary life. This educational mediation is essential because it allows children to understand the reasons behind a rule, going further than just obeying the rule, to the level of comprehension. Why this matters: Teaching children that their actions have consequences empowers them to make the best decisions regarding their own digital consumption. This approach is more viable than enforcement because it attempts to encourage internal motivation for healthy digital behavior.

**d. Active Supervision and Guidance**

A further significant result was the focus on supervision and children's guidance. This approach — referred to as active mediation — implies that parents actively track their children's digital lives. "Supervision" does not just mean making sure a kid complies with time limits — it requires that you be actively involved in what your child is consuming. Life: The Life category helps parents find age-appropriate and educational content for what their children want to watch. This may include watching videos together, playing games, or chatting about things online. It is a proactive method that has the added benefit of enabling parents to screen offensive materials and utilize digital media for educational and communication purposes. It turns screen time from a solitary experience to an

enriching one and encourages children to use screens in beneficial ways that help them grow both physically and socially.

**e. Implementing Consequences for Rule-Breaking**

Although less frequent, the study noted that some parents also reported delivering consequential responses when the rules were not followed. This may take the form of action, from the temporary seizure of the device to the withdrawal of other rights. Consequences are the principal reinforcement tool; they send the message that rules have real-world consequences. It is a critical element of a system of discipline that lets children know that the rules are serious, and it also helps them learn responsibility.

The prevalence of strategies, including setting limits and active supervision, suggests a very proactive or engaged approach by parents when it comes to the digital habits of their offspring. These findings are important because they provide a snapshot and exemplar portrayal of how theories of parental guidance are applied in practice, offering us an opportunity to learn from them as we continue to research parents in a more digitally driven manner.

## DISCUSSION

This study found a significant positive relationship between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah*, suggesting that the ability to think critically is a foundational element in the development of noble characters. These findings align with the theoretical frameworks of Ennis (1989), and the existing literature. The results indicate that while students at MIS Cokro Aminoto generally possess a good moral character, there is still room to enhance their critical thinking abilities, which could further solidify their *akhlakul karimah* (noble character).

### 1. Interpretation of Findings

A synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data uncovered a complex interrelation between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah* in fifth-grade students, offering an alternative to monolithic discourses of moral development. The quantitative results, where the description of students' *akhlakul karimah* in the "good" is (M=83.21), are in accordance with ideals that affirm character formation as the primary goal of Islamic education in Indonesia (Septiani et al., 2024). This result indicates the success of the madrasah institution in inculcating core moral values such as respect for teachers, being kind to friends, and doing religious obligations (Syaifin, 2022). This indicates that both formal and non-formal curricula have a positive impact, as they help inculcate moral behavioral patterns.

Nonetheless, an important implication can be derived based on the finding that critical thinking skills are rated as only the "fair" category (M=57.87). This finding is, therefore, a major theoretical paradox when combined with high moral scores. This implies a potential disconnect if character education is effective for inducing

compliance with moral rules but not for promoting cognitive skills that empower students to autonomously orient their moral compass in new, complex, or ethically uncertain situations. This is particularly true in the digital age, when children are increasingly confronted with information that deserves reasoned discrimination and not mere conformity to the norm (Desta Pradana & Owa-Onire Uthman, 2023). This discovery contradicts the fundamental presupposition behind theories of moral development, according to which cognitive maturity and ethical reasoning are intimately associated (Meyer, 2024; Zollo et al., 2017). Although the students may know what "good" behavior is, they may not necessarily have developed the cognitive skills to question why such action counts as good or to modify their perceptions when facing a new moral challenge (Klenk & Sauer, 2021).

The strong positive relationship ($r=0.331, p<0.05$) between critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah*, which explains only a small amount of variance (10.9%), is an important outcome. This finding is contrary to the argument that individual morality is a purely reflexive or habitual practice, as some traditional perspectives suggest (Abbott, 2020; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015; Shadnam, 2020). Instead, it sustains an integrated theoretical framework, as advanced by Ennis (1989), which includes a definition of critical thinking as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do." This research offers empirical evidence that this reflection process is a fundamental aspect of moral reasoning. Moreover, qualitative data echoed this link, with parents turning their attention to the need for children "to think critically and wisely," particularly when it came to navigating digital content and social interactions. This indicates that, although the internal influence of others (outer appearances, racial views) is a dominant force in moral development, critical thinking serves a monitoring function, enabling students to commit themselves to moral values and generalize them independently. In other words, moral judgment becomes an internalized system of self-regulation instead of an externally constrained do or do not list.

The qualitative findings further enrich this interpretation by highlighting parental perspectives. The most frequently cited benefits of critical thinking are increased knowledge, learning support, and communication aids. This underscores a pragmatic, family-oriented view in which critical thinking is valued as a tool for academic and social success. However, the qualitative data also reveal a central conflict: while parents recognize the value of critical thinking, their primary strategies for instilling morals, such as strict supervision and limited screen time, are more rooted in behavioral control than in cognitive development. This indicates a gap between parental aspirations and their practical methods, which may explain why students' moral behavior is well-developed, whereas their critical thinking remains moderate. This aligns with research on parental mediation that emphasizes restrictive and supervisory approaches (Sholih et al., 2024), but also presents an

opportunity for interventions that empower parents with strategies to foster reflective reasoning alongside behavioral regulation.

The findings of this study resonate with and contradict those of several other studies. On the one hand, studies such as those by Thoyyibah (2023) and Karimah (2022) have also reported concerns about the degradation of morals and ethics among students, a problem that the findings of this study partially support. However, while they highlighted this problem, our research provides a specific, measurable solution by focusing on critical thinking as a key lever. The current study is also in alignment with research emphasizing the importance of a conducive environment in fostering moral values (Sholih et al., 2024), but takes it a step further by focusing on the cognitive skills required to make independent moral choices.

Conversely, some traditional views on morality, as expressed in the provided text, suggest that morals are "reflexive" and do not require conscious thought (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015). Our finding of a positive correlation between critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah* challenges this view by demonstrating that a cognitive process is integral to moral decision-making. The finding that critical thinking contributes only 10.9% also leaves a significant gap, which other studies have attributed to various factors. For example, some researchers have emphasized the crucial role of parental strategies and time management (Mainuddin, 2023), while others have highlighted the importance of communication in the family environment (Luthfi et al., 2024). The remaining 89.1% of the variance in *akhlakul karimah* can be explained by these variables, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive model.

## 2. Practical Implications and Contributions

The current study has important implications for teachers, parents, and curriculum developers in elementary education, with real-world implications beyond the theoretical conclusions. The findings highlight that *akhlakul karimah* is not only a subject to be taught but also a skill that must be nurtured and developed through the learning process through the cognitive component, which they rarely use.

### a. Educators and Teachers

Evidence indicates that character education based on rote memorization or reiteration is insufficient. However, critical thinking exercises should be incorporated into teachers' daily activities. The practical implications of the findings of this study for teachers are as follows:

1) **Moral Dilemma Discussions:** Teachers are able to give students age-appropriate moral dilemmas by asking, "What would you do if you saw a friend cheating on a test?" or "What should you do if someone says something mean to another person?" All of these are vital aspects of critical

thinking (Ennis, 1989), promoting the opportunity for students to solve problems, taking views into account, and constructing a reasoned opinion.

2) **Project-based Learning:** In addition, project-based learning can be used by teachers to integrate character building among academic subjects (Purwanti et al., 2025). For example, students investigating "Community Helpers" for a social studies project may need to analyze how various individuals in the community contribute to the greater good and identify principles of ethics demonstrated through their work.

3) **Socratic Questioning:** Teachers do not need to tell students whether something is right or wrong; instead, they can facilitate the process of the student coming to a realization on their own by using Socratic questioning. For example, questioning, "Why do you think telling the truth is a good thing? This can help students relate the abstract notion of honesty to real-world consequences in their lives.

**b. For Parents**

The study's qualitative data highlight the crucial role of parents in fostering critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah*. Parents can apply these strategies at home to reinforce school-based learning for their children.

1) **Structured Play and Screen Time:** Our findings show that parental supervision and limited screen time (1-2 hours per day) are effective strategies. Parents should not only set limits but also engage with their children regarding the content they consume. For example, they can ask, "Why do you think that character made that choice?" or "What is a better way that situation could have been handled?" This transforms passive consumption into an opportunity for critical thinking.

2) **Open-ended Questions:** Parents should encourage children to think deeply by asking open-ended questions about their daily experiences. Instead of asking, "How was school?" they could ask, "What was the most challenging part of your day and how did you handle it?" This helps children practice problem-solving and reflective thinking.

3) **Model Behavior:** As seen in the literature, children learn best through examples. When parents model critical thinking, for instance, by openly discussing complex issues or showing how they evaluate information before forming an opinion, children are more likely to internalize these skills.

**c. Contribution to the Field of Education**

This study makes two primary contributions to the field of education. First, it empirically establishes a link between critical thinking skills and *akhlakul karimah* in the Indonesian primary school context, a relationship that has been underexplored. The finding that critical thinking accounts for a significant,

albeit small, portion of moral development provides a novel pathway for educational interventions. Second, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data in this study offers a holistic view of this issue. Quantitative correlation provides a statistical foundation, whereas qualitative insights from parents provide rich contextual examples that make the findings highly applicable. This approach enriches the understanding of character education and highlights the need for a collaborative approach between schools and families to cultivate well-rounded students who are not only morally upright but also intellectually capable of navigating a complex world.

### 3. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that need to be addressed in future work. First, the study sample was confined to one madrasah with a few students. This might restrict the transferability of the results to other schools and regions. Further research involving larger and more diverse samples is necessary to verify these findings. Second, 89.1% of the variance in *akhlakul karimah* was not accounted for by critical thinking skills. This illustrates the necessity of an expanded model of moral development. It is recommended that future studies further expand the research model by considering more variables of character development, such as parental involvement, social class, and peer influence, when attempting to understand character formation from different dimensions. As a result, a long-term study on the growth of critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah* could help us further understand the temporal linkage between them.

## CONCLUSION

This research successfully investigated the correlation between critical thinking skills and akhlakul karimah among fifth-grade students of MIS Cokro Aminoto, clearly answering the questions raised and making a substantial contribution to elementary-level education. Findings indicate that the akhlakul karimah of students falls into the “good” category (M = 83.21), whereas their critical thinking skills fall into the “fairly good” category (M = 57.87), suggesting room for development in their cognitive abilities. There was a significant positive correlation between critical thinking and *akhlakul karimah* ($r = 0.331$, $p < 0.05$), and critical thinking contributed to the development *of akhlakul karimah* by 10.9%.

This study supports the notion that, although critical thinking is not everything in being an upright person, it represents a necessary cognitive ability for moral competence. The implications of this study for basic education are twofold: the findings provide extra-empirical support for the inclusion of enhancing critical thinking as part and parcel of character education curriculum, and they inform a new view on how to form morality, which is closely related to traditional mechanical learning. The results suggest that cultivating critical thinking in elementary school

students enables educators to prepare them for more reflective and reasoned moral action, which is particularly timely for developing robust akhlakul karimah, as they begin to make moral judgments about complex modern life issues.

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