RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Arabic Calligraphy Learning in Shaping Students' Character: A Qualitative Study on Self-Awareness, Patience, and Perseverance in an Islamic Junior High School

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Arabic calligraphy learning in shaping students' character within an Islamic junior high school context. The research focuses on three core character traits: self-awareness, patience, and perseverance. Employing a qualitative field research approach, the study was conducted at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember during the 2018/2019 academic year. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of learning activities and students' calligraphic works. The findings reveal that Arabic calligraphy learning contributes significantly to character formation by integrating reflective practice, disciplined repetition, and spiritual engagement. Self-awareness was developed through continuous self-evaluation and recognition of learning progress, while patience emerged from the meticulous and repetitive nature of calligraphy practice that required emotional regulation and acceptance of gradual improvement. Perseverance was fostered through sustained effort, structured learning progression, teacher modeling, and a supportive *pesantren*-based educational environment. The study concludes that Arabic calligraphy learning functions not merely as an artistic or linguistic activity but as a holistic pedagogical medium that effectively integrates character education into formal schooling. These findings suggest that art-based learning, particularly within Islamic education, holds substantial potential for cultivating morally grounded and resilient learners.

Key words: Arabic Calligraphy Learning; Character Education; Self-Awareness; Patience; Perseverance; Islamic Education

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamentally a conscious and systematic effort to develop human potential in a holistic manner, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. In the contemporary educational landscape, however, formal schooling often prioritizes cognitive achievement and academic performance while marginalizing affective dimensions such as character, morality, discipline, and perseverance. This imbalance has raised significant concerns, particularly in societies experiencing moral degradation, declining social ethics, and weakened spiritual values among younger generations. As a response, character education has become a central agenda in national and institutional educational reforms, especially within faith-based educational contexts (Mulyasa, 2011; Mangunhardjana, 2016).

In Indonesia, the importance of character education is explicitly emphasized in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, which defines education as a deliberate effort to create learning environments that enable learners to actively develop spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and necessary skills for personal and societal life (Tim Penyusun, 2012). This legal foundation highlights that education is not merely an intellectual enterprise but a comprehensive process aimed at shaping morally grounded, responsible, and resilient individuals. Despite this normative framework, many educational practices remain predominantly knowledge-oriented, with insufficient pedagogical strategies designed to cultivate character values in a meaningful and experiential manner.

One promising yet underexplored approach to character education lies in the integration of art-based learning, particularly within Islamic education. Art education, by its nature, engages learners holistically, fostering sensitivity, discipline, creativity, emotional regulation, and perseverance. Among various forms of Islamic art, Arabic calligraphy occupies a distinctive position due to its deep spiritual, aesthetic, and pedagogical significance. Arabic calligraphy is not merely an artistic skill but a visual embodiment of Qur'anic revelation, functioning as a sacred medium through which divine messages are expressed and contemplated (Khoiri, 1999; Sirojuddin, 2014).

Historically, Islamic civilization has regarded calligraphy as the highest form of visual art, precisely because it is intrinsically connected to the written word of God. The Qur'an itself underscores the sanctity of writing and the pen, as stated in Surah Al-Qalam (68:1): "Nun. By the pen and what they inscribe" (Departemen Agama RI, 2005). This verse signifies the elevated status of writing as a means of preserving knowledge, transmitting values, and cultivating human consciousness. Consequently, the practice of calligraphy transcends technical mastery and enters the realm of spiritual discipline, self-reflection, and moral refinement.

From an educational perspective, learning Arabic calligraphy involves a complex interplay of psychomotor precision, cognitive understanding, and affective engagement. Students are required to exercise fine motor control, visual accuracy, and sustained concentration while simultaneously internalizing aesthetic principles and linguistic structures. More importantly, the process demands patience, perseverance, discipline, and self-awareness—core components of character education (Afif, 2002; Aqib, 2012). Unlike conventional instructional methods, calligraphy learning inherently resists instant gratification; progress is achieved gradually through repeated practice, correction, and reflection.

In the context of Arabic language education, calligraphy also addresses a persistent pedagogical challenge faced by Indonesian learners: the difficulty of mastering Arabic script. As Arabic is written from right to left and employs letter forms that change according to positional context, many students—especially those with non-madrasah educational backgrounds—experience anxiety, frustration, and low confidence when learning to write Arabic. Calligraphy instruction, when designed pedagogically, can transform this challenge into an engaging and meaningful learning experience, reducing cognitive barriers while fostering positive emotional engagement (Hermawan, 2011; Nuha, 2012).

Beyond linguistic competence, calligraphy learning offers a unique opportunity for character formation. Through the slow, deliberate act of writing sacred texts, students are encouraged to regulate their emotions, develop perseverance in the face of difficulty, and cultivate a reflective awareness of their own abilities and limitations. Scholars in graphology and educational psychology suggest that handwriting activities reflect and shape internal psychological states, including motivation, emotional stability, and self-confidence (Margareth, 2004; Siswanto, 2010; Yosandy, 2016). Thus, calligraphy learning functions not only as a technical skill but also as a medium for self-recognition and personal growth.

Islamic boarding school–based institutions (*pesantren*-based schools) are particularly well-positioned to integrate calligraphy learning into character education frameworks. These institutions emphasize holistic development, combining religious instruction, moral cultivation, and academic learning within a disciplined communal environment. SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember represents a compelling case in this regard. As a junior high school affiliated with an Islamic boarding school, it incorporates Arabic calligraphy as a local content subject aimed at enhancing students' Arabic literacy while simultaneously nurturing character values rooted in Islamic ethics.

A distinctive feature of calligraphy learning at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember is the presence of a highly accomplished calligraphy instructor with international recognition. The teacher's expertise, pedagogical authority, and personal example play a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences. Educational theorists emphasize that character formation is significantly influenced by modeling, habituation, and meaningful teacher-student interactions (Hamalik, 2009; Sagala, 2013; Sadirman, 2014). In this context, the calligraphy classroom becomes a moral space where values are transmitted not only through instruction but also through lived practice and exemplary conduct.

Despite its potential, empirical research examining the role of calligraphy learning in character formation remains limited, particularly within junior high school settings. Existing studies tend to focus on calligraphy as a means of improving writing skills or aesthetic appreciation, with insufficient attention to its affective and character-building dimensions. Moreover, few studies have explored how specific character traits—such as self-awareness, patience, and perseverance—are cultivated through structured calligraphy learning processes in real classroom contexts.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the implementation of calligraphy learning in shaping students' character at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember during the 2018/2019 academic year. Specifically, the study

focuses on three core character dimensions: (1) self-awareness, understood as students' ability to recognize their strengths, limitations, and learning processes; (2) patience, reflected in emotional regulation, persistence, and attentiveness during learning activities; and (3) perseverance, demonstrated through sustained effort, practice, and commitment to improvement.

By employing a qualitative field research approach, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how calligraphy learning is designed, implemented, and experienced by students and teachers, as well as how it contributes to character formation in an Islamic educational context. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse on character education and art-based pedagogy, while offering practical insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking innovative strategies for integrating character education into formal schooling.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a field research design to explore in depth the implementation of Arabic calligraphy learning in shaping students' character. Qualitative research was chosen because it enables researchers to understand social phenomena holistically by examining meanings, processes, interactions, and experiences within their natural contexts (Moleong, 2013; Afrizal, 2014). The focus of this study was not on measuring outcomes statistically but on interpreting how calligraphy learning was practiced and how it contributed to the formation of specific character traits, namely self-awareness, patience, and perseverance among students.

The research was conducted at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember, an Islamic junior high school integrated with a *pesantren*-based educational system, during the 2018/2019 academic year. This site was selected purposively due to its distinctive curriculum that incorporates Arabic calligraphy as a local content subject and its strong emphasis on character education within an Islamic framework. The school environment, which combines formal schooling with religious values and disciplined learning culture, provided a rich context for examining the relationship between art-based learning and character formation.

The primary subjects of this study were students of class IX F, who actively participated in calligraphy learning activities, as well as the calligraphy teacher who played a central role in designing and implementing instruction. Additional informants included school administrators and supporting teachers to enrich contextual understanding and triangulate data. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research focus. This sampling strategy allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth, information-rich data rather than broad generalizations (Santri et al., 2014).

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were carried out to capture real-time learning processes, teacher-student interactions, students' behavioral responses, and manifestations of character traits during calligraphy instruction. Observations focused on students' attitudes, learning discipline, emotional regulation, persistence in practice, and responses to feedback. The researcher adopted a non-

participant observation role to minimize disruption while maintaining close engagement with the learning environment.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the calligraphy teacher and selected students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and reflections regarding calligraphy learning and character development. Interviews with the teacher emphasized instructional goals, pedagogical strategies, character values emphasized in teaching, and challenges encountered in guiding students. Student interviews explored learning experiences, emotional responses, perceived character changes, and motivational factors. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility while ensuring alignment with research objectives (Moleong, 2013).

Documentation complemented observation and interview data by providing tangible evidence of learning activities and outcomes. Documents included lesson plans, student worksheets, samples of calligraphy work, photographs of classroom activities, school regulations, and institutional guidelines related to character education. These materials helped contextualize findings and verify consistency between planned instruction and actual practice.

Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as proposed in qualitative research methodology (Afrizal, 2014; Moleong, 2013). Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation by identifying themes related to self-awareness, patience, and perseverance. Relevant data were coded and categorized to facilitate systematic interpretation. Data display was conducted by organizing findings into descriptive narratives that illustrated patterns of character formation through calligraphy learning. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous reflection, comparison, and verification to ensure that interpretations were grounded in empirical evidence.

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, this study employed triangulation of sources and techniques. Information obtained from students was cross-checked with teacher interviews and observational data, while findings from observations were corroborated with documentation. This triangulation process enhanced the validity of the findings by reducing researcher bias and strengthening interpretive accuracy (Santri et al., 2014). Additionally, prolonged engagement in the research site and persistent observation enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning context and participants' behaviors.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from school authorities, and participants were informed about the purpose of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' identities, and data were used solely for academic purposes.

Through this methodological framework, the study sought to generate a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of how Arabic calligraphy learning contributes to character formation in an Islamic junior high school setting, thereby offering insights relevant to both theory and educational practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Calligraphy Learning and the Development of Self-Awareness

The findings indicate that Arabic calligraphy learning plays a significant role in fostering students' self-awareness. Self-awareness in this context refers to students' ability to recognize their own abilities, limitations, emotional states, and learning progress throughout the calligraphy learning process. This character trait emerged gradually as students engaged in repetitive writing practice, self-evaluation, and reflective correction of their calligraphic work.

Classroom observations revealed that during calligraphy lessons, students were consistently encouraged to observe and analyze their own handwriting forms, including letter proportions, stroke balance, spacing, and accuracy of diacritical marks. The teacher frequently asked students to compare their current work with previous exercises, allowing them to recognize improvements as well as persistent weaknesses. This reflective activity enabled students to become more conscious of their personal learning trajectories rather than merely focusing on external evaluation.

Figure 1. Classroom Calligraphy Learning Activity

The calligraphy teacher emphasized that recognizing one's own handwriting characteristics is an essential foundation of artistic and personal development. In an interview, the teacher explained that calligraphy learning is not intended to produce instant perfection but to help students "understand who they are through their writing process." According to the teacher, students who initially lacked confidence gradually became more aware of their potential after realizing that improvement was possible through consistent effort. This pedagogical approach aligns with character education theories that emphasize reflective learning and self-recognition as prerequisites for moral and personal growth (Mangunhardjana, 2016; Aqib, 2012).

Student interviews further confirmed this finding. Several students reported that at the beginning of the semester they felt anxious and insecure about their ability to write Arabic letters correctly. However, continuous practice and guided feedback helped them identify specific aspects that needed improvement, such as letter curvature, line pressure, or spacing consistency. One student described that reviewing earlier calligraphy assignments made them realize their progress, which increased self-confidence and motivation to improve further. This process reflects the

development of self-awareness through experiential learning, where learners actively engage with their own performance and internalize personal insights (Sagala, 2013).

Graphological perspectives support this phenomenon by suggesting that handwriting reflects psychological conditions such as confidence, emotional stability, and motivation (Margareth, 2004; Siswanto, 2010). In this study, students' calligraphic works demonstrated visible changes over time, including more controlled strokes, balanced compositions, and increased consistency. These changes were not only technical but also indicative of students' growing self-regulation and awareness of their own learning processes.

Figure 2. Students' Calligraphy Work Samples

Moreover, the integration of Qur'anic texts in calligraphy exercises contributed to deeper self-reflection. Writing sacred verses required students to slow down, maintain focus, and respect the content being written. This process fostered a sense of responsibility and internal discipline, reinforcing self-awareness at both cognitive and spiritual levels. As noted by Sirojuddin (2014), calligraphy serves as a medium of contemplation that bridges aesthetic practice and spiritual consciousness, making it particularly effective for character formation within Islamic education.

Thus, the results demonstrate that calligraphy learning at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember facilitates self-awareness through reflective practice, guided feedback, and meaningful engagement with sacred texts. This finding extends previous research on calligraphy education by highlighting its role beyond skill acquisition, emphasizing its contribution to internal character development.

Calligraphy Learning and the Formation of Patience

Patience emerged as a dominant character trait developed through calligraphy learning. Patience in this study is understood as students' ability to regulate emotions, persist through difficulty, maintain focus, and accept gradual progress without frustration. The nature of calligraphy learning—requiring precision, repetition, and attention to detail—naturally cultivates this character value.

Observational data revealed that students often encountered challenges during calligraphy practice, such as uneven strokes, incorrect proportions, or mistakes in diacritical marks that altered meaning. Rather than allowing frustration to dominate the learning atmosphere, the teacher emphasized calm correction, repeated practice, and acceptance of mistakes as part of the learning process. Students were encouraged

to erase, rewrite, and refine their work patiently until satisfactory results were achieved.

The teacher explained during interviews that patience is deliberately nurtured as a core value in calligraphy instruction. According to the teacher, students are reminded that mastering calligraphy is a long-term process that cannot be rushed. This instructional philosophy reflects Islamic educational values that view patience (ṣabr) as a fundamental moral virtue, essential for both learning and spiritual growth (Aqib, 2012; Saleh, 2012).

Student testimonies further supported this observation. Many students acknowledged that calligraphy lessons initially felt demanding and time-consuming, especially when required to repeat the same letters multiple times. However, over time, they learned to control impatience and focus on incremental improvement. One student stated that although the process was tiring, seeing gradual improvement made the effort worthwhile and encouraged continued perseverance. This finding aligns with educational psychology theories that emphasize the role of delayed gratification in developing emotional resilience and self-discipline (Sadirman, 2014).

The formation of patience was influenced by both internal and external factors. Internally, students' interest in calligraphy, personal motivation, and awareness of learning goals played a crucial role. Externally, teacher modeling, motivational encouragement, structured practice routines, and peer interaction contributed significantly. The teacher consistently demonstrated patience through calm instruction and supportive feedback, providing a behavioral model for students to emulate. Such modeling is widely recognized as an effective strategy for character education (Hamalik, 2009; Mulyasa, 2011).

Islamic textual foundations further reinforce the importance of patience in education. The Qur'an emphasizes patience as a virtue rewarded without measure (Qur'an 39:10), highlighting its central role in personal development (Departemen Agama RI, 2005). In this study, the integration of religious values within calligraphy instruction strengthened students' understanding of patience not merely as a learning strategy but as a moral obligation.

Additionally, documentation of students' final semester projects showed noticeable improvements in technical quality and artistic expression compared to earlier works. These improvements were the result of sustained practice rather than innate talent alone, underscoring the significance of patience in achieving mastery.

Figure 3. Final Semester Calligraphy Projects

Overall, the findings indicate that Arabic calligraphy learning effectively cultivates patience by embedding discipline, repetition, emotional regulation, and spiritual reflection within the learning process. This reinforces the argument that art-based learning, particularly when integrated with religious values, provides a powerful medium for character education.

Calligraphy Learning and the Development of Perseverance

Perseverance emerged as a salient character trait cultivated through sustained engagement in Arabic calligraphy learning. In this study, perseverance refers to students' continuous effort, consistency, and commitment to improving their calligraphic skills despite encountering difficulties, fatigue, or initial failure. Unlike short-term motivation, perseverance reflects long-term dedication and resilience, which are essential for both academic success and character development (Aqib, 2012; Mangunhardjana, 2016).

Classroom observations demonstrated that calligraphy learning required students to engage in repetitive practice over extended periods. Students were assigned regular exercises that demanded precision in letter formation, proportional balance, and stylistic consistency. Many students initially struggled to maintain accuracy, particularly when transitioning from basic letter writing to more complex compositions. However, rather than abandoning the task, most students persisted, gradually refining their technique through continuous practice.

The calligraphy teacher emphasized during interviews that perseverance is intentionally embedded in the learning design. Students are required to complete assignments incrementally, beginning with simple strokes and progressing toward complete calligraphic compositions. According to the teacher, this structured progression trains students to "trust the process" and to understand that mastery cannot be achieved instantly. Such pedagogical sequencing aligns with educational theories that highlight the importance of sustained effort and habit formation in character education (Hamalik, 2009; Mulyasa, 2011).

Students' reflections further illustrated the development of perseverance. Several students acknowledged that repeated mistakes often led to feelings of discouragement, particularly when comparing their work with peers who appeared more advanced. Nevertheless, continuous encouragement from the teacher and visible improvement over time motivated them to persist. One student explained that seeing gradual improvement in their calligraphy gave them confidence to continue practicing, even when progress felt slow. This experience reflects the formation of perseverance through experiential learning, where students internalize effort as a pathway to achievement rather than viewing ability as fixed.

The learning environment at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember also contributed significantly to fostering perseverance. As a *pesantren*-based school, the institutional culture emphasizes discipline, consistency, and commitment to long-term goals. These values were reinforced in calligraphy classes through regular practice schedules, clear expectations, and constructive feedback. The presence of peer competition—where students observed classmates' progress—functioned as a positive external motivator that encouraged sustained effort rather than discouragement.

The teacher's role as a model of perseverance was particularly influential. Students were aware of the teacher's professional journey as a nationally and internationally recognized calligrapher, achieved through years of disciplined practice. During interviews, the teacher shared personal experiences of failure and perseverance in mastering calligraphy, which resonated strongly with students. Educational literature underscores that such role modeling is a powerful tool in character education, as students often internalize values demonstrated consistently by respected figures (Sagala, 2013; Sadirman, 2014).

Religious values embedded within calligraphy learning further reinforced perseverance. Students frequently wrote Qur'anic verses that emphasize endurance, effort, and trust in divine guidance. Islamic teachings highlight perseverance as a moral obligation, encouraging believers to remain steadfast in pursuing goodness despite hardship. The Qur'an explicitly instructs believers to remain devoted and persistent in worship and effort (Departemen Agama RI, 2005). This spiritual dimension strengthened students' understanding of perseverance not merely as an academic requirement but as an ethical and religious value.

Documentation of students' final semester projects revealed substantial improvement in both technical proficiency and artistic confidence. Compared to early assignments, later works exhibited better stroke control, refined composition, and more expressive aesthetic quality. These improvements were achieved through sustained practice rather than innate talent, underscoring the central role of perseverance in learning outcomes.

Figure 4. Final Calligraphy Projects Displayed for Assessment

Overall, the findings suggest that Arabic calligraphy learning effectively nurtures perseverance by integrating structured practice, teacher modeling, peer interaction, and religious values. This character trait manifested not only in students' calligraphy performance but also in their broader learning attitudes, such as increased willingness to complete tasks, improved concentration, and stronger commitment to long-term goals.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of Arabic calligraphy learning in shaping students' character at SMP Plus Darus Sholah Jember during the 2018/2019 academic year. Employing a qualitative field research approach, the study explored how calligraphy learning contributes to the development of three core character traits:

self-awareness, patience, and perseverance. The findings demonstrate that Arabic calligraphy learning functions not merely as an artistic or linguistic activity but as a holistic pedagogical medium that integrates cognitive, psychomotor, affective, and spiritual dimensions.

The study revealed that self-awareness was cultivated through reflective writing practices, guided feedback, and continuous self-evaluation. By analyzing their own calligraphic work and monitoring progress over time, students developed a deeper understanding of their strengths, limitations, and learning processes. This reflective engagement enhanced students' confidence and intrinsic motivation, supporting theories that emphasize self-recognition as a foundation of character development (Mangunhardjana, 2016; Siswanto, 2010).

Patience emerged as a central character value developed through the repetitive, meticulous nature of calligraphy practice. Students learned to regulate emotions, accept mistakes, and appreciate gradual progress. The integration of religious values and teacher modeling reinforced patience as both a moral virtue and a learning strategy. This finding supports previous research highlighting the role of disciplined artistic practice in fostering emotional regulation and resilience (Afif, 2002; Aqib, 2012).

Perseverance was fostered through sustained practice, structured learning progression, and supportive learning environments. Students demonstrated increasing commitment to completing tasks and improving performance despite challenges. The teacher's role as a model of perseverance and the *pesantren*-based institutional culture significantly strengthened this character trait. These results affirm the importance of long-term effort and consistency in character education, particularly within art-based learning contexts (Mulyasa, 2011; Saleh, 2012).

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on character education by demonstrating how art-based learning—specifically Arabic calligraphy—can serve as an effective medium for integrating character formation into formal education. Practically, the findings suggest that educators and curriculum developers should consider incorporating calligraphy or similar artistic practices into character education programs, especially in Islamic educational institutions.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited to a single institutional context and a specific group of students. Future research could expand the scope by employing comparative or mixed-method approaches across different educational settings to further examine the impact of calligraphy learning on character development. Nevertheless, this study provides empirical evidence that Arabic calligraphy learning holds significant potential as a pedagogical strategy for nurturing morally grounded, patient, and perseverant learners in contemporary education.

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