

Character Development among Teenagers in Public and Private Educational Institutions in Pakistan: An Empirical Study

Asmara Batool*

National University of Pakistan, Pakistan

asmarabatool1979@gmail.com

Farman Ali

Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan

farman.ali@riphah.edu.pk

Kamran Ahmed

Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan

kamran.ahmed@riphah.edu.pk

submitted: 3 April 2026, accepted: 29 June 2026, published: 30 June 2026

*corresponding author

Abstract

Character development is a fundamental objective of education, yet growing emphasis on academic achievement and career preparation has raised concerns about the declining moral and ethical development of adolescents. This study examined whether institutional type commercial (private) or non-commercial (public) influences adolescent character development and Islamic personality in Pakistan. A quantitative comparative cross-sectional design was employed involving 200 secondary school students from commercial and non-commercial educational institutions in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Data were collected using an adapted Character-Building Scale and the Integrative Islamic Personality Inventory (IIPI). Descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, Pearson correlation, and Cohen's d were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The results revealed no statistically significant difference in character-building scores between students from commercial and non-commercial schools ($t = -0.95$, $p = .343$), with a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.13$) and a very weak correlation between institutional type and character outcomes ($r = -0.073$). Descriptive findings indicated relatively high levels of moral conscience, conflict resolution, prayer, faith-driven morality, and modesty, whereas academic integrity, decision making, empathy, and conceptions of success received comparatively lower ratings. These findings suggest that adolescents' character development is influenced more by ecological factors including family, school culture, peer relationships, and digital environments than by institutional classification alone. From an Islamic educational perspective, the study reinforces the importance of integrating akhlaq-based education with supportive family and school environments to cultivate ethical behavior. The findings contribute empirical evidence from Pakistan and provide practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen holistic character education in both Islamic and secular educational contexts.

Keywords: *Character Building, Islamic Values, Education Systems, Adolescents*

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of human development, serving not only to enhance cognitive abilities but also to cultivate moral values, ethical reasoning, and responsible citizenship. Contemporary educational systems are expected to prepare students to succeed academically while developing the personal and social competencies necessary to address increasingly complex societal challenges (Loots et al., 2025; Yanniris, 2021). International organizations, including UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), emphasize that quality education extends beyond academic achievement to encompass character formation, social responsibility, and lifelong learning (Elfert & Rasmussen, 2024; Power, 2015). Consequently, character education has become an integral component of educational reform agendas aimed at fostering ethical leadership, civic engagement, and sustainable development. Despite these aspirations, many educational systems continue to prioritize standardized testing and academic performance over students' moral and character development, creating concerns about the long-term social consequences of education that focuses predominantly on cognitive outcomes.

Character development is a multidimensional process involving the formation of moral values, ethical judgment, emotional regulation, and socially responsible behavior (Miller, 2023). It encompasses virtues such as honesty, integrity, respect, empathy, justice, responsibility, and self-discipline that enable individuals to interact constructively within diverse communities. Educational researchers have consistently argued that character is not an innate quality but develops gradually through interactions among family, school, peers, and the wider social environment (Pollak et al., 2024). Schools occupy a particularly important position because they provide structured learning experiences, establish behavioral expectations, and create opportunities for students to practice moral decision-making in everyday situations. Positive school climates, supportive teacher–student relationships, and value-based curricula have been associated with stronger moral reasoning, improved interpersonal relationships, and healthier psychological development among adolescents (Podiya et al., 2025; Šutić et al., 2025). Conversely, educational environments that emphasize academic competition without adequate attention to ethical development may contribute to declining empathy, increased behavioral problems, and weakened social responsibility.

Adolescence represents one of the most critical developmental stages for character formation because it is characterized by rapid cognitive (Loots et al., 2025), emotional (Griffin, 2017), social (Malti et al., 2021), and moral (Chorny et al., 2026). During this period, young people actively construct personal identities while becoming increasingly influenced by peers, teachers, digital media, and broader social contexts. Decisions and experiences during adolescence often shape attitudes and behaviors that persist throughout adulthood. Consequently, educational institutions have a unique responsibility to foster environments that encourage ethical reflection, empathy, cooperation, and responsible citizenship alongside academic learning. Recent educational research has shown that adolescents who receive systematic character education demonstrate higher levels of emotional well-being, stronger interpersonal skills, greater civic engagement, and lower levels of antisocial behavior (Irwan et al., 2025; Schoeps et al., 2018). These findings reinforce the importance of integrating character education into formal schooling rather than treating it as a supplementary component of the curriculum.

From an Islamic perspective, character (akhlaq) constitutes the practical manifestation of faith and represents one of the principal objectives of education (Nabi et al., 2024;

Rohmadani & Achadi, 2026). Islamic educational philosophy seeks to develop balanced individuals by integrating intellectual excellence with moral integrity and spiritual refinement. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes moral purification (tazkiyah) (March, 2024), wisdom (hikmah) (Adeel, 2019), justice (adl) (Babali, 2025), compassion (rahmah) (Yabi et al., 2021), and good conduct (adab) (Maaref, 2018) as essential attributes of believers. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is regarded as the supreme model of moral excellence, exemplifying honesty, trustworthiness, humility, mercy, and social responsibility (Yacine, 2024). Accordingly, Islamic education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge by fostering ethical behavior that benefits both individuals and society. In an era characterized by globalization, technological transformation, and shifting social values, integrating Islamic moral principles with contemporary educational practices offers an important framework for strengthening adolescents' character while maintaining relevance to modern educational needs.

Pakistan has recognized the strategic importance of character education through successive educational reforms and national policies (Rind & Abowitz, 2024). Recent initiatives, including the National Rahmatul-lil-Alameen Wa Khatam-un-Nabiyyin Authority (NRKNA) framework, explicitly position moral and ethical development as central objectives of the national education system. Nevertheless, implementation varies considerably among educational institutions because of differences in governance, institutional resources, curriculum implementation, teacher preparation, and school culture. Pakistan's educational landscape is broadly divided into commercial (private) and non-commercial (public) institutions, each operating under distinct administrative structures and educational priorities (Shahzad & Wajid, 2023). Commercial schools generally possess greater financial resources, smaller class sizes, and enhanced facilities, whereas public schools prioritize educational accessibility and broader social inclusion. Although these institutional differences are well recognized, it remains unclear whether they produce meaningful differences in adolescents' moral and character development.

The rapid modernization and commercialization of education further complicate this issue (Khurshid et al., 2024). Increasing emphasis on academic achievement, institutional rankings, standardized examinations, and employability has shifted educational priorities toward measurable cognitive outcomes. Simultaneously, advances in digital technology and artificial intelligence have transformed learning environments while introducing new ethical challenges related to digital citizenship, misinformation, social interaction, and responsible technology use. These developments underscore the need for educational systems that balance academic excellence with moral development and ethical responsibility. Consequently, scholars increasingly argue that effective character education should not be viewed as separate from academic learning but rather as an essential foundation for preparing students to navigate complex social and technological environments responsibly.

Although previous studies have examined character education, school climate, adolescent moral development, and Islamic educational philosophy, several important research gaps remain. First, existing research has largely focused on conceptual discussions or evaluations of individual educational interventions rather than directly comparing the influence of commercial and non-commercial educational institutions on adolescent character development. Second, relatively few empirical studies integrate Islamic educational perspectives with contemporary theories of character education within Muslim-majority societies. Third, limited evidence is available from Pakistan regarding the extent to which institutional type contributes to character formation relative to other influential factors,

including teacher role models, curriculum implementation, parental involvement, and school culture. Addressing these gaps is important because evidence-based educational policies require a clearer understanding of whether differences in institutional structure translate into meaningful differences in students' moral development.

Therefore, this study investigates the role of commercial (private) and non-commercial (public) educational institutions in shaping teenage character in Abbottabad, Pakistan. By integrating Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary theories of character development and employing comparative empirical analysis, this study contributes to the growing literature on moral education in Muslim-majority contexts. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, school leaders, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to strengthen character education within diverse educational settings. Ultimately, this research aims to support the development of educational systems that promote not only academic excellence but also ethical leadership, social responsibility, and holistic human development among adolescents.

METHOD

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative comparative cross-sectional design to examine differences in teenage character development between commercial (private) and non-commercial (public) educational institutions in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Public schools were classified as non-commercial institutions because they are government funded, whereas private schools were categorized as commercial institutions due to their fee-based management. The comparative design enabled an empirical assessment of whether institutional type was associated with differences in students' moral, ethical, and social character development.

The target population comprised adolescents aged 13–19 years enrolled in secondary schools in Abbottabad, a city recognized for its extensive educational infrastructure. A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure balanced representation by institutional type and gender. The final sample consisted of 200 students, including 100 students from commercial schools and 100 from non-commercial schools, with equal representation of male and female participants. The sample size was constrained by limited institutional access because several schools were reluctant to participate in research addressing character education and ethical behavior. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the socio-cultural context of Abbottabad rather than generalized to all educational settings in Pakistan.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire comprising three sections: demographic characteristics, character-building attributes, and Islamic personality dimensions. Character development was assessed using an adapted version of the Moral Identity Scale developed by Reed and Aquino (2003), expanded to include dimensions identified in contemporary literature on adolescent character education, including honesty, tolerance, creativity, accountability, patriotism, kindness, social responsibility, environmental awareness, and critical thinking. Islamic personality was measured using an adapted version of the Integrative Islamic Personality Inventory (IIPI) developed by Ismail and Tekke (2015), which evaluates ethical and behavioral characteristics grounded in Islamic values. Responses

were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was prepared in both English and Urdu to enhance linguistic accessibility and minimize response bias.

Validity and Reliability

Content and construct validity were established through expert evaluation involving specialists in education, psychology, statistics, and psychometrics. Expert feedback was incorporated to improve conceptual alignment, wording clarity, and cultural appropriateness. A pilot study involving students with characteristics similar to the target population was subsequently conducted to evaluate instrument clarity and feasibility. Based on pilot findings, the initial 40-item questionnaire was refined to 28 items, with minor linguistic revisions to improve comprehension.

Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The overall instrument demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.893$). The Character-Building Scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.894, while the Islamic Personality Inventory demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.892, indicating high internal consistency for both constructs.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected after obtaining approval from participating schools. Written informed consent was obtained from school authorities, parents or guardians, and all participants before questionnaire administration. Participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. All findings are reported in aggregate form to protect participants' identities.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and study variables. Differences in character development between commercial and non-commercial educational institutions were examined using independent-samples t-tests. Cohen's d was calculated to estimate effect sizes, while Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine associations between institutional type and character-building outcomes. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Character-Related Challenges Among Adolescents

To provide contextual evidence regarding adolescent character development, educational professionals from 15 commercial and non-commercial secondary schools were surveyed. Respondents included principals, coordinators, teachers, and disciplinary committee members representing schools from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Using a dichotomous (agree/disagree) questionnaire, respondents evaluated the prevalence of behavioral and moral challenges among teenage students.

As shown in Figure/Table X, the majority of respondents (67%) agreed that adolescents currently exhibit noticeable character-related problems, whereas 33% disagreed. Frequently reported concerns included dishonesty, academic cheating, disrespect toward teachers, inappropriate language, poor self-control, absenteeism, excessive use of mobile phones and social media, physical conflict, and limited personal accountability. Respondents also

identified materialistic attitudes and inappropriate interpersonal relationships as emerging behavioral concerns. These findings suggest that character-related issues are widely recognized across both commercial and non-commercial educational settings.

Comparison of Character-Building Scores by Institutional Type

An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether character-building scores differed between students attending commercial and non-commercial educational institutions. The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t = -0.95$, $p = .343$), indicating that institutional type was not associated with students' overall character-building outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1. Independent-Samples *t*-Test Comparing Character-Building Scores

Statistic	Value
<i>t</i>	-0.95
<i>p</i>	.343

Because the obtained *p*-value exceeded the significance criterion ($\alpha = .05$), the null hypothesis could not be rejected.

Magnitude of Group Differences

To evaluate the practical significance of the observed difference, Cohen's *d* was calculated. As presented in Table 2, the effect size was -0.13, indicating a negligible difference between commercial and non-commercial educational institutions.

Table 2. Effect Size (Cohen's *d*)

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Cohen's <i>d</i>	-0.13	Negligible

The effect size indicates that institutional type explained only a trivial proportion of the variation in students' character-building scores.

Association Between Institutional Type and Character Development

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between institutional type and students' overall character-building scores (Honor Points). The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.073$, indicating a very weak negative association (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation Between Institutional Type and Character-Building Scores

Statistic	Value
Pearson's <i>r</i>	-0.073

The near-zero correlation suggests that the type of educational institution was minimally associated with adolescents' character-building outcomes.

Character Trait Profiles

Students' responses to the Character-Building Scale were analyzed across eighteen dimensions representing core character attributes, including honesty, moral conscience,

trustworthiness, academic integrity, empathy, civic responsibility, tolerance, emotional intelligence, decision making, creativity, patriotism, critical thinking, and media literacy.

Overall, mean scores ranged from 3.40 to 4.43, indicating moderate to high endorsement of positive character traits. The highest ratings were observed for moral conscience, conflict resolution, creativity and open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and patriotism, whereas comparatively lower scores were found for decision making, academic integrity, empathy and kindness, and national identity (Table 4). Standard deviations ranged from 0.88 to 1.16, reflecting moderate variability in students' responses across character dimensions. Taken together, the descriptive findings indicate that adolescents generally reported positive moral characteristics; however, the variability across dimensions suggests that several aspects of character development remain less consistently established than others.

Table 4: Distribution of Student Responses on Character Traits with Mean and Standard Deviation

Q#	Character Trait Assessed	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	SD
1	Honesty	2.5	3.0	15.0	47.5	32.0	4.04	0.90
2	Moral Conscience	2.5	2.0	6.0	29.0	60.5	4.43	0.89
3	Trustworthiness	3.0	2.0	15.5	41.0	38.5	4.10	0.94
4	Academic Integrity	6.0	10.0	32.0	32.0	20.0	3.50	1.10
5	Empathy & Kindness	6.0	13.0	29.5	27.5	24.0	3.50	1.16
6	Compassionate Cooperation	3.0	3.0	17.5	47.5	29.0	3.97	0.97
7	Conflict Resolution	2.5	1.0	10.0	37.0	49.5	4.30	0.88
8	Moral Courage	3.5	5.0	18.0	39.5	34.0	3.96	1.02
9	Civic Responsibility	4.5	5.5	24.5	33.0	32.5	3.84	1.08
10	Tolerance	2.5	2.5	21.0	40.5	33.5	4.00	0.93
11	Emotional Intelligence	3.0	8.5	21.0	39.5	28.0	3.81	1.02
12	Decision Making	5.0	16.0	27.0	38.0	14.0	3.40	1.09
13	Creativity & Open-mindedness	4.5	2.5	14.0	34.5	44.5	4.12	1.04
14	Patriotism	2.0	6.0	15.0	37.0	40.0	4.07	0.97
15	Active Citizenship	4.5	4.5	17.0	29.5	44.5	4.05	1.09
16	National Identity	3.0	10.0	29.0	31.5	26.5	3.69	1.07
17	Critical Thinking	4.0	4.5	25.0	40.5	26.0	3.80	1.03
18	Media Literacy & Judgment	1.0	5.5	27.5	41.5	24.5	3.83	0.88

Table 4 presents students' responses across the 18 dimensions of the Character-Building Scale. Overall, the descriptive statistics indicate moderate to high levels of self-reported character

development, with mean scores ranging from 3.40 to 4.43. Most character dimensions received average scores above the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, suggesting generally positive perceptions of students' moral and ethical characteristics.

Among the assessed dimensions, moral conscience recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.89$), followed by conflict resolution ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.88$), creativity and open-mindedness ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.04$), trustworthiness ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.94$), patriotism ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.97$), active citizenship ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.09$), and honesty ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.90$). These findings indicate that respondents generally reported strong moral awareness, prosocial attitudes, and civic values.

In contrast, comparatively lower mean scores were observed for decision making ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.09$), academic integrity ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.10$), empathy and kindness ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.16$), and national identity ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.07$). Although these dimensions remained above the scale midpoint, they represented the least strongly endorsed aspects of character development among the participants.

Standard deviations ranged from 0.88 to 1.16, indicating moderate variability across all character dimensions. The relatively low variability observed for conflict resolution and media literacy and judgment ($SD = 0.88$) suggests greater consistency in students' responses, whereas higher variability for empathy and kindness ($SD = 1.16$), academic integrity ($SD = 1.10$), and decision making ($SD = 1.09$) indicates greater heterogeneity in these traits across respondents.

Table 5. Distribution of Responses Across the Character-Building Scale (Items 1–18, $N = 200$)

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	125	3.47
Disagree	208	5.78
Neutral	746	20.72
Agree	1,333	37.03
Strongly Agree	1,188	33.00
Total	3,600	100.00

Table 5 summarizes participants' responses across all 18 items of the Character-Building Scale. Positive responses predominated, with 70.03% of all responses falling within the Agree and Strongly Agree categories, compared with only 9.25% classified as Disagree or Strongly Disagree. Approximately one-fifth of responses (20.72%) were neutral.

The predominance of positive responses indicates that students generally perceived themselves as demonstrating desirable character attributes across the assessed domains. Nevertheless, the proportion of neutral responses suggests that endorsement was not uniform across all character dimensions, reflecting variation in the strength of particular moral and civic attributes. This overall response pattern is consistent with the descriptive statistics presented in Table 4, where most character traits exhibited moderate to high mean scores.

Islamic Personality Inventory

Students' responses to the Islamic Personality Inventory are presented in Table 6. The inventory assessed ten dimensions of Islamic personality, including prayer and worship, manners and behavior, material detachment, religious influence on career, concept of success, peer influence, views on co-education, selfless help, faith-driven morality, and modesty.

Table 6: Interpretation of Islamic Personality Test

Q#	Islamic Trait Assessed	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean $\pm$ SD
Q19	Prayer & Worship	2.0	2.5	9.5	35.0	51.0	4.30 $\pm$ 0.89
Q20	Manners & Behavior	6.5	11.5	22.5	35.5	24.0	3.59 $\pm$ 1.16
Q21	Material Detachment	7.0	8.0	17.5	32.5	35.0	3.80 $\pm$ 1.20
Q22	Religious Influence on Career	4.0	13.5	29.0	29.0	24.5	3.56 $\pm$ 1.12
Q23	Concept of Success	24.5	32.5	20.5	13.0	9.5	2.51 $\pm$ 1.25
Q24	Peer Influence	9.5	7.5	22.5	28.0	32.5	3.66 $\pm$ 1.26
Q25	Views on Co-Education	11.0	17.0	32.0	21.5	18.5	3.20 $\pm$ 1.24
Q26	Selfless Help	15.0	13.0	16.5	22.5	33.0	3.46 $\pm$ 1.44
Q27	Faith-Driven Morality	2.5	2.0	13.0	37.0	45.5	4.21 $\pm$ 0.92
Q28	Modesty & Hijab	2.0	3.5	19.5	23.5	51.5	4.19 $\pm$ 1.00

Overall, mean scores ranged from 2.51 to 4.30, indicating considerable variation across the assessed dimensions. The highest mean score was observed for prayer and worship ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.89$), followed by faith-driven morality ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.92$) and modesty and hijab ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.00$). High scores were also reported for material detachment ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.20$) and peer influence ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.26$), suggesting relatively strong endorsement of these dimensions.

In contrast, lower mean scores were recorded for concept of success ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 1.25$), views on co-education ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.24$), selfless help ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.44$), religious influence on career ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.12$), and manners and behavior ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.16$). Although these dimensions remained above or near the midpoint of the five-point scale, they exhibited comparatively lower levels of endorsement than the other Islamic personality constructs.

Standard deviations ranged from 0.89 to 1.44, indicating moderate variability in participants' responses. The greatest variability was observed for selfless help ($SD = 1.44$), whereas prayer and worship demonstrated the highest level of response consistency ($SD = 0.89$).

Table 7. Overall Distribution of Responses Across the Islamic Personality Inventory (Items 19–28, $N = 200$)

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	164	8.20
Disagree	218	10.90
Neutral	424	21.20
Agree	547	27.35
Strongly Agree	647	32.35
Total	2,000	100.00

Table 7 summarizes the overall response distribution across the ten items of the Islamic Personality Inventory. Positive responses (Agree and Strongly Agree) accounted for 59.70% of all responses, whereas 19.10% were classified as Disagree or Strongly Disagree. Approximately 21.20% of responses were neutral.

Overall, participants reported relatively high levels of Islamic personality across the assessed dimensions, with stronger endorsement observed for religious practices and faith-related moral values than for dimensions associated with social attitudes and personal decision-making. The response distribution is consistent with the descriptive statistics presented in Table 6, where prayer, faith-driven morality, and modesty exhibited the highest mean scores.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether institutional type (commercial versus non-commercial schools) influences adolescent character development and Islamic personality among secondary school students in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The findings revealed no statistically significant difference in character-building scores between students attending commercial and non-commercial institutions ($t = -0.95$, $p = .343$), with a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.13$) and an almost nonexistent correlation between institutional type and character outcomes ($r = -0.073$). These results indicate that school ownership alone explains little variation in adolescents' moral and ethical development. Rather than institutional classification, character formation appears to be shaped by broader ecological influences that operate across educational settings.

This finding is consistent with ecological perspectives on human development, which emphasize that adolescents develop through interactions among family, school, peers, and the wider social environment rather than through institutional characteristics alone. It also supports the work of Retnawati et al. (2026), who argued that school culture, teacher modeling, and interpersonal relationships are more influential than school type in promoting character education. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2022) reported that students' moral development is more strongly associated with social and educational climates than with whether schools are publicly or privately managed. The negligible effect size observed in the present study further strengthens this interpretation by demonstrating that the practical influence of institutional type is minimal despite differences in administrative structure and funding.

The contextual survey of educational professionals provides additional insight into these findings. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) acknowledged the presence of character-related problems among adolescents, including dishonesty, academic cheating, disrespect toward teachers, poor self-control, excessive social media use, absenteeism, and declining personal accountability. Importantly, these concerns were reported across both commercial and non-commercial schools, suggesting that contemporary behavioral challenges are systemic rather than institution-specific. Similar observations have been reported by Akram et al. (2023), who found that teachers in Pakistani private schools perceived increasing behavioral difficulties among adolescents despite institutional efforts to promote discipline. Together, these findings suggest that schools face common moral challenges regardless of their organizational model.

Although institutional type did not differentiate overall character outcomes, the descriptive analysis revealed an important pattern across individual character dimensions. Students reported particularly strong levels of moral conscience, conflict resolution, trustworthiness, patriotism, and creativity and open-mindedness, indicating that fundamental moral awareness and prosocial dispositions remain relatively well established among adolescents. However, comparatively lower scores were observed for academic integrity, decision making, empathy and kindness, and national identity. These findings suggest that while adolescents possess general moral knowledge, they experience greater difficulty applying ethical principles in situations involving personal judgment, interpersonal relationships, and academic responsibility. This distinction between moral awareness and behavioral implementation has been widely recognized in contemporary character education research, which argues that knowing moral values does not necessarily translate into consistent ethical behavior without sustained practice, reflection, and supportive environments (Brown et al., 2023; Lee, 2014).

The overall response distribution reinforces this interpretation. More than 70% of responses to the Character-Building Scale fell within the Agree and Strongly Agree categories, indicating generally positive self-perceptions of character. Nevertheless, approximately one-fifth of responses were neutral, suggesting uncertainty or inconsistency across several character dimensions. This pattern may reflect the developmental characteristics of adolescence, during which identity formation, emotional regulation, and moral reasoning continue to evolve. Adolescents often possess an understanding of desirable values while simultaneously experiencing challenges in applying them consistently within increasingly complex social contexts (Jadwiszczak et al., 2025).

The findings from the Islamic Personality Inventory provide additional insight into adolescents' value orientations. Religious dimensions directly related to prayer and worship, faith-driven morality, and modesty received the highest levels of endorsement, indicating that core religious beliefs and practices remain salient among the participants. In contrast, lower scores were observed for concept of success, religious influence on career decisions, selfless help, and views on co-education. This pattern suggests that while students maintain strong commitment to foundational religious practices, greater variation exists when Islamic values intersect with contemporary social, educational, and professional contexts. Such findings are consistent with previous studies of Muslim adolescents, which distinguish between adherence to religious rituals and the integration of religious principles into everyday social and ethical decision-making (Laeheem, 2013).

From an Islamic educational perspective, these findings reinforce the understanding that *akhlaq* is not merely the acquisition of religious knowledge but the cultivation of consistent moral conduct through continuous practice and environmental influence. Classical Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh emphasized that virtuous character develops through repeated habituation, self-discipline (*mujahadah*), and righteous companionship rather than through formal instruction alone. This perspective is reflected in the Prophetic tradition: "A person follows the religion of his close companion, so let each of you consider whom he befriends" (Sunan Abu Dawud, 4833). The hadith highlights the importance of peer relationships in shaping moral behavior and provides a theological explanation for why institutional type alone failed to produce meaningful differences in character development. Adolescents in both school sectors are exposed to similar peer networks, digital environments, and broader cultural influences that may outweigh institutional distinctions.

Family and community environments are also likely to explain the absence of institutional differences. Previous research consistently demonstrates that parental involvement, moral modeling, and supportive family relationships contribute substantially to adolescent character formation. Students who experience consistent ethical guidance at home are more likely to demonstrate honesty, empathy, and self-regulation regardless of the school they attend. Conversely, limited parental supervision or inconsistent moral reinforcement may reduce the effectiveness of school-based character education programs. These findings align with Sarkadi et al. (2022), who argued that character education should be understood as a collaborative responsibility shared among families, schools, and communities rather than as an outcome attributable to educational institutions alone.

Another important explanation relates to the growing influence of digital environments. Adolescents enrolled in both commercial and non-commercial schools are exposed to similar social media platforms, online communities, and algorithm-driven digital content. Such environments increasingly shape identity formation, moral reasoning, and social interaction, often independently of school curricula. Recent scholarship has emphasized that digital technologies and artificial intelligence are transforming adolescents' ethical experiences by influencing values, interpersonal communication, and decision-making processes (Porayska-Pomsta et al., 2023;

Sharples, 2023). Consequently, differences in school management may become less influential than shared digital experiences that transcend institutional boundaries.

The findings also carry practical implications for educational policy. Because institutional type was not associated with character outcomes, investments in character education should prioritize improvements in school culture, teacher professional development, family engagement, and community partnerships rather than focusing solely on structural differences between public and private education. Integrating character education across curricular and extracurricular activities, strengthening collaboration with parents, and promoting ethical digital citizenship may provide more effective strategies for fostering adolescents' moral development than institutional reforms alone (Huda et al., 2024; Mansir et al., 2021). Within Islamic educational contexts, strengthening programs that connect religious practice with ethical decision-making in everyday life may also help bridge the gap between religious commitment and the application of moral values in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether institutional type influences adolescent character development and Islamic personality among secondary school students in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The findings revealed no significant differences in character-building outcomes between commercial and non-commercial schools, with a negligible effect size and a very weak correlation. These results indicate that school ownership alone has little influence on adolescents' moral and ethical development. Although institutional type was not a significant predictor, students generally reported positive levels of character and Islamic personality, particularly in moral conscience, conflict resolution, prayer and worship, faith-driven morality, and modesty. In contrast, lower scores for academic integrity, decision making, empathy, selfless help, and the concept of success suggest that applying moral and religious values consistently in everyday life remains a challenge.

The findings support an ecological and Islamic educational perspective, highlighting that character development is shaped more by family, peer relationships, school culture, community, and digital environments than by institutional classification. Accordingly, character education should adopt a holistic approach that integrates schools, families, and communities while strengthening ethical digital citizenship and the practical application of Islamic values. This study contributes empirical evidence from Pakistan by demonstrating that improving adolescents' character requires strengthening the quality of educational environments rather than focusing solely on school type. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs across broader geographical contexts and examine additional factors, including parenting practices, school climate, socioeconomic conditions, peer influence, and digital media engagement, to better understand the complex determinants of adolescent character development.

REFERENCES

- Adeel, M. A. (2019). Concept of Wisdom in the Qur'ān. In *Sophia Studies in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures* (Vol. 29, pp. 99–106). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17558-0_7
- Akram, H., Al-Adwan, A. S., Aslam, S., & Khan, M. I. (2023). Pedagogical practices and challenges in cultivating moral values: A qualitative study of primary school teachers in Pakistan. *Education 3-13*, 51(4), 607–619. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2021.1992471>
- Babali, Y. (2025). The Spirituality of Leadership in Islam. In *Spirituality for Leaders: Theoretical*

- Insights and Practical Tools* (pp. 83–88). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003640912-14>
- Brown, M., McGrath, R. E., Bier, M. C., Johnson, K., & Berkowitz, M. W. (2023). A comprehensive meta-analysis of character education programs. *Journal of Moral Education*, 52(2), 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2022.2060196>
- Chorny, O. O., Kamenshchuk, T. D., Hryshchenko, O. P., Maksymchuk, I. A., & Yefremova, O. P. (2026). Social maturity of young men: developmental features. *Modern Pediatrics. Ukraine*, 2026(1), 66–74. [https://doi.org/10.15574/SP.2025.1\(153\).6674](https://doi.org/10.15574/SP.2025.1(153).6674)
- Elfert, M., & Rasmussen, P. (2024). Transnational adult education governance and policy: the role of OECD and UNESCO. In *Research Handbook on Adult Education Policy* (pp. 132–146). <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803925950.00019>
- Griffin, A. (2017). Adolescent neurological development and implications for health and well-being. *Healthcare (Switzerland)*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare5040062>
- Huda, N., Widodo, B. S., & Aseri, M. (2024). Strategies for Strengthening Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools Through Extracurricular Activities. *Munaddhomah*, 5(3), 354–366. <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v5i3.1397>
- Irwan, M., Irfan, I., Rahman, S. R., Kadir, L., & Risnah, R. (2025). Teachers' and Adolescents' Perceptions of Mental Health and Character Education as Preventative Measures Against Youth Violence. *Journal of Public Health and Pharmacy*, 5(1), 105–118. <https://doi.org/10.56338/jphp.v5i1.6303>
- Ismail, N. A. H., & Tekke, M. (2015). Integrative Islamic Personality Inventory: Development and Validation. *IIUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 3(2), 113–130. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijes.v3i2.91>
- Jadwiszczak, M., Wawrzyniak, S., & Pezdek, K. (2025). More than movement: a systematic review of moral and social development in adolescents physical education. *BMC Public Health*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-23169-2>
- Khurshid, S., Khurshid, S., & Toor, H. K. (2024). Learning for an uncertain future: artificial intelligence a challenge for Pakistani education system in the era of digital transformation. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 26(2), 196–206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-02-2024-0045>
- Laeheem, K. (2013). Reception of behavior supervision based on Islamic belief among Muslim adolescents in the three southern-border provinces, Thailand. *Kasetsart Journal - Social Sciences*, 34(2), 323–334. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84886862913&partnerID=40&md5=aff54f09f1e8c99600685862cb7a6f8f>
- Lee, I. J. (2014). Moral and character education in Korea. In *Handbook of Moral and Character Education* (pp. 326–343). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203114896>
- Loots, R., Moloto, M., & von der Heyde, V. (2025). The Power of Imagination: Leading Curriculum Renewal for Transformative Higher Education. In *Higher Educational Leadership in VUCA Contexts: Accessing VUCA Prime and Wisdom for Effective Leadership* (pp. 1–20). <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83608-682-620251001>
- Maaref, M. (2018). Various types of dialogues and features of a corrective dialogue in the Qur'an. *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 74(3), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5140>
- Malti, T., Galarneau, E., & Peplak, J. (2021). Moral Development in Adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31(4), 1097–1113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12639>
- Mansir, F., Purnomo, M. E., Harto, K., & Hawi, A. (2021). Implementing Character Education in Madrasah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 7(1), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v7i1.8449>
- March, A. F. (2024). Islamic Political Thought. In *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political*

- Philosophy: Second Edition* (pp. 211–221). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003411598-21>
- Miller, T. W. (2023). Character Education Update: Building a Buffer Against School Violence. In *School Violence and Primary Prevention, Second Edition* (pp. 605–618). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13134-9_24
- Nabi, U., Fayaz, I., Kamal, S. S. L. A., & Shah, S. A. (2024). Akhlāq Scale: Development and Estimation of Psychometric Properties. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000512>
- Podiya, J. K., Navaneetham, J., & Bhola, P. (2025). Influences of school climate on emotional health and academic achievement of school-going adolescents in India: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-21268-0>
- Pollak, I., Stiehl, K. A. M., Birchwood, J., Schrank, B., Zechner, K. A., Wiesner, C., & Woodcock, K. A. (2024). Promoting Peer Connectedness Through Social-Emotional Learning: Evaluating the Intervention Effect Mechanisms and Implementation Factors of a Social-Emotional Learning Programme for 9 to 12-Year-Olds. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 53(1), 89–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01871-x>
- Porayska-Pomsta, K., Holmes, W., & Nemorin, S. (2023). The ethics of AI in education. In *Handbook of Artificial Intelligence in Education* (pp. 571–604). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800375413.00038>
- Power, C. (2015). Education for the twenty-first century. In *Education in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Vol. 27, pp. 89–106). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-221-0_6
- Reed, A., & Aquino, K. F. (2003). Moral identity and the expanding circle of moral regard toward out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(6), 1270–1286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.6.1270>
- Retnawati, H., Zurqoni, Z., Ilyasin, M., Djidu, H., Kartianom, K., & Apino, E. (2026). Character Education Across School Contexts: A Qualitative Study of High- and Regular-Performing Schools in Indonesia. *The Qualitative Report*, 31(6), 6079–6092. <https://doi.org/10.46743/1052-0147.4636>
- Rind, G. M., & Abowitz, K. K. (2024). Education reforms and democracy in Pakistan: the problem of privatisation. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 22(5), 875–889. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2022.2142934>
- Rohmadani, Z. V., & Achadi, M. W. (2026). Integrating religious dimensions and humanistic education to enhance student personality: A case study in Indonesian madrasas. *Multidisciplinary Science Journal*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2026208>
- Sarkadi, Casmana, A. R., Hisyam, C. J., & Wardatussa'idah, I. (2022). Integrating Character Education Into the RECE Learning Model Through Pancasila and Citizenship Education Subjects. *Frontiers in Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2022.841037>
- Schoeps, K., Villanueva, L., Prado-Gascó, V. J., & Montoya-Castilla, I. (2018). Development of emotional skills in adolescents to prevent cyberbullying and improve subjective well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9(OCT). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02050>
- Shahzad, S., & Wajid, G. (2023). How different is the Learning Environment of Public and Private Sector Medical Colleges in Lahore, Pakistan? *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 39(3), 757–763. <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.39.3.6202>
- Sharples, M. (2023). Towards social generative AI for education: theory, practices and ethics. *Learning: Research and Practice*, 9(2), 159–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23735082.2023.2261131>
- Šutić, L., Roviš, D., & Mihić, J. (2025). The Relationship Between Positive Youth Development

- and School Climate – Results of a Longitudinal Panel Study. *Drustvena Istrazivanja*, 34(2), 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.34.2.05>
- Thomas, K. J., Cunha, J. M. da, & Santo, J. B. (2022). Just environments foster character: A longitudinal assessment of school climate. *Journal of Moral Education*, 52(4), 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2022.2081138>
- Yabi, S., Halim, A. A., Hassan, S. N. S., Basir, A., & Mamat, A. (2021). People with Special Needs and Their Care: A Quranic View. *Quranica*, 13(1 Special Issue 6), 236–257. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85218225827&partnerID=40&md5=07987e25501c43a05ae746d5af9c7027>
- Yacine, M. (2024). Leadership in Action: Exploring the Principles of Prophet Muhammad in Contemporary Management Practices. In *Emotionally Intelligent Methods for Meaningful Leadership* (pp. 1–30). <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-7372-9.ch001>
- Yanniris, C. (2021). Education for sustainability, peace, and global citizenship: An integrative approach. *Education Sciences*, 11(8). <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080430>