



Moral Education in the Story of Prophet Yusuf: A Thematic Study of Classical and Contemporary Tafsir

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Abstract

Moral education is a crucial aspect of human character formation. The moral crisis of the modern era demands a strengthening of education grounded in divine values. The Qur'an presents the story of Prophet Yusuf as a moral exemplar encompassing honesty, patience, self-control, and leadership. This study aims to examine the moral educational values in the story of Prophet Yusuf based on classical and contemporary exegesis. The research employs library research with a thematic (*tafsir maudhu'i*) approach. The findings show that classical exegesis (such as Ibn Kathir and al-Ṭabari) emphasizes moral aspects through a narrative-based approach, while contemporary exegesis (such as Quraish Shihab and al-Maraghi) highlights the moral relevance for modern life. The study concludes that the moral education embedded in the story of Prophet Yusuf remains relevant and can serve as a foundation for Islamic education in the present era.

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INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a transformational instrument that shapes the character, work ethic, and life skills of Indonesia's younger generation (Zahwa et al., 2025). However, in practice, the educational process often places greater emphasis on cognitive aspects and technical skills, while the moral and spiritual dimensions receive insufficient attention (Asbari, 2024). This imbalance in human development has resulted in a generation that is intellectually capable but morally fragile.

The moral crisis afflicting modern society is marked by the prevalence of deviant behaviors such as corruption, violence, drug abuse, pornography, moral degradation, and dishonesty across

various sectors, which has become a significant national problem among adolescents (Nata, 2016). This situation necessitates the strengthening of moral education grounded in Islamic values (Anita, 2025). The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, contains numerous wisdom-filled narratives that can serve as guidance, one of which is the story of Prophet Yusuf (Drajat, 1995).

The Qur'an contains not only theological teachings and legal principles but also narratives rich in moral education (Huda, 2020). Among these, the story of Prophet Yusuf *'alaihissalām* in Surah Yusuf receives particular attention. Allah even refers to this narrative as *ahsanu al-qasas* (the best of stories) because it encompasses profound moral, spiritual, and social lessons.

Surah Yusuf specifically portrays the life journey of Prophet Yusuf, offering abundant moral lessons. In the Qur'an, the story of Yusuf stands out as one of the longest, most coherent, and systematically presented narratives. From beginning to end, it unfolds in a continuous sequence, tracing his life from childhood to his eventual role as a leader in Egypt.

Allah SWT affirms that this narrative is *ahsanu al-qasas* (the best of stories), as stated in Q.S. Yusuf [12]: 3. This affirmation indicates that the story of Yusuf is not merely a historical account but embodies profound meanings, moral values, and timeless wisdom that can serve as guidance for humanity across all eras. (M. Q. Shihab, 2002).

From the perspective of moral education, the story of Prophet Yusuf is rich with life lessons that encompass various aspects of human existence. It not only presents the personal example of a Prophet but also imparts social, spiritual, and leadership principles. Each episode of his life offers Muslims practical moral values applicable to modern life, as the narrative of Prophet Yusuf conveys a wide range of essential teachings.

Qur'anic exegesis plays a crucial role in uncovering the moral educational values within the story of Prophet Yusuf. Classical commentaries, such as *Tafsir al-Tabari* and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, emphasize transmitted narrations and detailed accounts inherited from the early generations (salaf). In contrast, contemporary exegeses, including *Tafsir al-Maraghi* and *Tafsir al-Misbah* by M. Quraish Shihab, focus more on contextualizing meanings to address modern issues (M. Q. Shihab, 2002). A comparative study of classical and contemporary interpretations reveals both the continuity and the distinctions in exegetical approaches to understanding the moral education conveyed in the story of Prophet Yusuf.

Classical exegesis highlights moral aspects from a traditional perspective (Musa et al., 2025), whereas contemporary exegesis emphasizes the relevance of these values in a modern context (Ibrahim, 2024). Therefore, this study is essential to examine the moral educational values in the story of Prophet Yusuf based on both classical and contemporary interpretations and to explore their relevance to current Islamic education. This research is expected to contribute academically to the field of Qur'anic studies and exegesis, while also offering practical benefits for advancing Islamic education with a stronger focus on character formation.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the moral educational values in the story of Prophet Yusuf as interpreted in both classical and contemporary exegesis.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019). The qualitative approach is chosen because the research aims to analyze texts (the Qur'an and exegetical works) to identify concepts of moral education rather than to test empirical field data. Library research enables the author to examine primary and secondary literature in depth to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation.

The primary data sources for this research are the Qur'an, specifically Surah Yusuf, which recounts the story of Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him), and key classical and contemporary exegetical works. Secondary sources include books and scholarly articles on moral education, Islamic education, and thematic studies in Qur'anic exegesis, such as Ibn Miskawaih's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, Abuddin Nata's *Pendidikan dalam Perspektif al-Qur'an*, and other modern literature on Islamic character education.

The analysis employs a *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic exegesis) approach to examine the interpretations of both classical and contemporary scholars. A pedagogical perspective is applied to reveal the relevance of Prophet Yusuf's story in shaping students' moral character, while a historical-sociological approach aids in understanding the socio-cultural context of Yusuf's narrative as interpreted by the exegetes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The story of Prophet Yusuf in Surah Yusuf is one of the most comprehensive narratives in the Qur'an, rich with moral lessons on both individual and social levels. Classical exegesis highlights the normative aspects of prophetic example, while contemporary interpretations often relate the account to modern issues. From this perspective, moral education can be drawn as a universal guide. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

Patience and Steadfast Faith

One of the main pillars of moral education derived from the story of Prophet Yusuf is patience (*ṣabr*) and steadfast faith (*istiqāmah*). Yusuf's patience is evident from the outset of the narrative: he is separated from his father's affection due to his brothers' jealousy, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned despite his innocence. This series of trials demonstrates that a prophet's life is filled with tests ordained by Allah as spiritual and moral training, both for himself and for future generations. The story of Prophet Yusuf provides an exemplary model of perseverance in the face of slander, imprisonment, and life's hardships.

In *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, it is noted that Prophet Yusuf's patience when falsely accused by Zulaikha exemplifies the character of a true believer who relies solely on Allah in facing life's trials (Kathir, 1999). Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab in

Tafsir al-Misbah emphasizes that Yusuf's patience was not merely passive endurance but a spiritual strategy to achieve moral and social triumph (M. Q. Shihab, 2002). The moral lesson drawn here is the importance of cultivating patience and steadfastness (*istiqāmah*) when confronting life's various challenges.

Upholding Honor and Resisting Temptation

The pinnacle of moral education in Yusuf's story is reflected in his refusal of the seduction to commit adultery by the wife of al-'Aziz. This incident is recorded in Q.S. Yusuf [12]: 23–25, depicting a profoundly challenging situation: Yusuf was a young and handsome man, under his master's authority, with the doors locked tight, and the one tempting him was a noblewoman. Despite these pressures, Yusuf chose the path of honor, rejecting her advances with the words, "*Ma'ādza'llāh* (I seek refuge in Allah)!" This declaration illustrates the strength of faith (*taqwā*), which serves as the most powerful moral safeguard against temptation.

In *Tafsir al-Ṭabari*, it is emphasized that Yusuf's rejection stemmed from the strength of his faith and his fear of Allah (*taqwā*) (Al-Ṭabari, 1954). Al-Ṭabari clarifies that this refusal was not due to a lack of desire but to unwavering faith that shielded him from sin. Meanwhile, Sayyid Quṭb in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'an* highlights the psychological dimension of Yusuf's choice: even under intense pressure, he remained committed to a lawful and honorable path, serving as a model for Muslim youth in safeguarding personal integrity (Quṭb, 2006). From this, it can be understood that Yusuf teaches that true freedom is not the license to follow every carnal impulse, but the ability to control it.

Honesty and Integrity

One of the most significant moral values in the story of Prophet Yusuf is his honesty and integrity when entrusted

with a public office. After enduring numerous life trials, Yusuf was ultimately appointed as Egypt's treasurer. He declared:

قَالَ أَجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٥﴾

[Yusuf] said, "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian." (Q.S. Yusuf [12]: 55).

This verse is not merely a statement of self-recognition but also an expression of moral accountability and professional competence.

According to Al-Baghawi, this verse underscores the importance of trustworthiness and honesty in holding public office (Al-Baghawī, 1993). Al-Zuhaili, in *Tafsir al-Munir*, links it to the modern concept of leadership integrity, emphasizing that a leader must be professional and competent, not merely appointed due to lineage or social status (Al-Zuhaili, 2001). The moral values conveyed, honesty, professionalism, and integrity in leadership are essential for building governance that is just and focused on public welfare. These values remain highly relevant for moral education and the cultivation of future generations.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

One of the most profound moral moments in Yusuf's story occurs when he forgives his brothers who had wronged him (Q.S. Yusuf [12]: 92):

قَالَ لَا تَثْرِيبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ يَغْفِرُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَهُوَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿٩٢﴾

He said, "No blame will there be upon you today. Allah will forgive you; and He is the most merciful of the merciful." (Q.S. Yusuf [12]: 92)

In *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Yusuf's act of forgiveness is highlighted as a moral

example consistent with the Prophet Muhammad's teachings on compassion and brotherhood (Kathir, 1999). Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab underscores that Yusuf's attitude represents a form of social reconciliation aimed at fostering harmony and eradicating resentment within society (M. Q. Shihab, 2002). The moral message derived from this episode is the crucial importance of forgiveness in resolving both social and familial conflicts.

Moral Educational Wisdom in Contemporary Context

The story of Prophet Yusuf offers not only a moral exemplar for past generations but also universal values highly relevant to the challenges of modern education and life. While classical exegeses such as those of al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathir, and al-Baghawi emphasize normative aspects, divine commands, prohibitions, and the direct example of Yusuf's character contemporary scholars like Quraish Shihab, Sayyid Quṭb, and Wahbah al-Zuhaili seek to present these Qur'anic messages within the framework of present-day issues.

Character Education in Schools: Emphasizing Self-Control

The most prominent moral values from the story of Yusuf are patience and self-control, both in resisting Zulaikha's temptation and in enduring slander and imprisonment. In today's educational context, these values are crucial to instill in students (M. Q. Shihab, 2011).

Preventing Moral Decline Among Youth Due to Free Association

The younger generation must be equipped with religion-based moral education to shield themselves from the tide of globalization that promotes a permissive culture (Quṭb, 2005). Character education programs, Islamic counseling, and strengthened family resilience serve as key strategies to prevent moral degradation.

Leadership Ethics and Public Management Based on Honesty and Competence

In the context of modern Indonesia, this message is especially significant amid widespread corruption and weak integrity among public officials. The story of Yusuf can inspire a model of good governance grounded in Qur'anic values. Al-Zuhaili relates this to the concept of modern leadership integrity, asserting that positions of authority should not be granted based on lineage or nepotism but on professionalism. Quraish Shihab further emphasizes that a leader may put himself forward if he possesses the abilities required to serve the people (M. Q. Shihab, 2002).

Social Conflict Resolution Through Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The pinnacle of Yusuf's character is revealed when he forgives his brothers who once cast him into a well. Rather than seeking revenge, Yusuf chose forgiveness: "No blame will there be upon you today" (Q.S. Yusuf: 92). In modern societies often afflicted by horizontal conflicts, political, social, or religious the values of forgiveness and reconciliation provide a vital foundation for building social harmony (A. Shihab, 2005). Moral education must teach that moral strength surpasses vengeance and retaliation.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the story of Prophet Yusuf presents a comprehensive framework for moral education, encompassing: (1) individual development through self-control and steadfast faith; (2) youth formation by modeling Yusuf's moral resilience in the face of temptation; (3) leadership cultivation emphasizing integrity, honesty, and professionalism; and (4) community development by instilling the values of forgiveness and reconciliation to preserve unity.

Thus, the story of Prophet Yusuf, as interpreted in both classical and contemporary exegesis, can serve as a

practical guide for Islamic character education in addressing the challenges of globalization, moral decline, and the current crisis of leadership.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The story of Prophet Yusuf in the Qur'an is rich with timeless moral values, encompassing patience and steadfast faith in the face of trials, exemplary self-respect amid temptation, honesty and professionalism in leadership, as well as forgiveness and reconciliation toward those who once acted unjustly. Both classical and contemporary exegesis affirm that Yusuf's example remains relevant to modern education, ranging from strengthening adolescent character and shaping ethical leadership to fostering a culture of tolerance. These values demonstrate that moral education is not merely theoretical but a concrete practice that shapes individuals, communities, and Islamic educational systems to cultivate a generation of faithful, virtuous individuals prepared to confront global challenges.

Character education is recommended to integrate the values from the story of Prophet Yusuf into curricula and learning activities through contextual methods, real-case discussions, and practical role modeling, supported by collaboration among schools, families, and communities to ensure consistent application of moral principles. Future research could examine the implementation of these values in shaping youth leadership, evaluate the effectiveness of Qur'anic story-based character education programs, compare their application across cultures and religions, or conduct longitudinal studies to assess their long-term impact on the behavior and morality of younger generations.

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