INTEGRATION OF CHARACTER VALUES IN THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at MI Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo, Demak, and the implementation process in learning activities. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews with PAI teachers and the school principal, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The findings show that five main character values—religiosity, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and social care—have been systematically integrated into the PAI curriculum. The integration is implemented through thematic learning, teacher role modeling, routine habituation, and strengthening of school culture. These findings are in line with character education theories emphasizing planned and continuous character development. This study is limited to one madrasah and does not examine long-term impacts on students' character formation. Nevertheless, the results provide practical contributions for improving the implementation of character education in PAI learning at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level.

Keywords: Curriculum Integration, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Habituation, Thematic Learning

INTRODUCTION | مقدمة

Education plays a strategic role in shaping the quality of a nation's generation, encompassing intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Education is not merely intended to enhance cognitive abilities, but also to form whole individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble character (akhlak mulia). Within the framework of national development, education functions as a primary instrument for preparing human resources who are adaptive to societal changes and demonstrate social responsibility as citizens. Muslich (2011) argues that education which prioritizes academic achievement without balancing it with character formation tends to produce individuals who are intellectually capable yet morally vulnerable.

In the era of globalization and rapid digital transformation, educational challenges have become increasingly complex and multidimensional. Students are exposed to an overwhelming flow of information, shifting social values, and global cultural influences that are not always aligned with national and religious values. This condition potentially contributes to moral degradation among the younger generation, manifested in declining discipline, weakened responsibility, and reduced social awareness. Tilaar (2012) emphasizes that globalization requires education systems not only to produce competitive individuals, but also those equipped with strong character to critically filter negative external influences.

Responding to these challenges, character education has emerged as a central agenda in the national education system. Character education is understood as a planned, systematic, and continuous process aimed at internalizing moral values so that learners are able to think, behave, and act in accordance with ethical norms and noble values. Samani and Hariyanto (2017) define character education as a conscious and structured effort to develop learners into morally sound, dignified, and responsible individuals. In line with the comprehensive character education framework, character formation must involve cognitive understanding, affective internalization, and consistent behavioral practice (Lickona, 2012). Therefore, character education cannot be limited to theoretical instruction, but must be embedded within meaningful and contextual learning experiences.

One of the most decisive instruments in implementing character education is the curriculum. Beyond functioning as an academic guideline, the curriculum serves as a strategic vehicle for systematic value internalization. A well-designed curriculum integrates character values into learning objectives, content, pedagogical strategies, and assessment systems. Zubaedi (2018) asserts that the curriculum represents the educational roadmap; without explicit curriculum planning, character education tends to be fragmented and dependent on individual teacher initiatives. From a systemic perspective, character education becomes effective only when values are structurally embedded within formal curriculum documents.

Within the context of Islamic education, the integration of character values is supported by strong theological and pedagogical foundations. Islamic education fundamentally aims to develop individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and morally upright. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) emphasizes not only the cognitive mastery of Islamic teachings, but also the internalization of values that guide attitudes and behavior in daily life. Fatimah (2021) highlights that PAI learning must prioritize value internalization so that religious teachings move beyond normative knowledge and become lived practices for students.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), as an Islamic-based primary education institution, holds a strategic position in shaping students' character from an early age. At this developmental stage, learners are highly responsive to habituation, role modeling, and environmental influences. Consequently, PAI learning in MI is expected to instill essential character values such as religiosity, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, and social care. Lickona (2012) affirms that character education is most effective when initiated at an early age, as early internalization significantly influences long-term personality development.

Previous studies indicate that character values in PAI learning are commonly implemented through habituation practices, teacher role modeling, and extracurricular activities. However, many of these efforts are not supported by systematic curriculum integration, resulting in character education being incidental and difficult to evaluate. Lickona (2012) stresses that character education must be intentional, strategically designed, and supported by collective commitment from schools, teachers, and families.

Furthermore, the rapid development of information technology presents both opportunities and challenges for character education. Digital learning media can enhance students' motivation and support the internalization of religious values, yet uncontrolled use may negatively affect character development. Rahman and Hidayat (2020) emphasize that educational technology should be value-oriented, serving as a means to strengthen character rather than merely improving cognitive outcomes.

Local cultural values also play a crucial role in reinforcing character education. Indigenous

values such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), politeness, and musyawarah (deliberation) are congruent with Islamic teachings and can function as contextual learning resources. Tilaar (2012) states that culture constitutes the primary medium of education; education detached from its cultural context risks losing relevance and identity. Hasanah (2019) demonstrates that contextual PAI learning grounded in daily life practices effectively fosters responsibility and social awareness among students.

Despite extensive literature on character education, a significant research gap remains concerning the systematic integration of character values within formal PAI curriculum documents, particularly at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level. Existing studies predominantly focus on behavioral practices and non-academic programs, while in-depth analyses of curriculum-based integration remain limited. Zubaedi (2018) notes that without explicit curricular integration, character education cannot function as an integral component of the learning process.

Therefore, this study offers an original contribution by focusing on the structured integration of character values within the PAI curriculum itself, rather than merely examining instructional practices. Specifically, this research aims to (1) analyze the process of integrating character values into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, and (2) identify the character values embedded within the curriculum. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to Islamic education and character education studies, and practically to support teachers, madrasah administrators, and policymakers in designing a PAI curriculum that systematically fosters students' character development.

METHOD | منهج

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the process of character value integration in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at MI Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to describe social phenomena naturally and contextually, in accordance with real conditions in the research setting (Sugiyono, 2018; Moleong, 2017). The research was conducted over a two-month period, from October to November 2025.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and direct interaction with informants, including the madrasah principal, two Aqidah Akhlak teachers, and six students. A total of nine interview sessions were conducted, each lasting approximately 30–60 minutes, depending on the availability of participants and the depth of the discussion (Arikunto, 2010; Sutopo, 2006). The selected teachers had between 8 and 15 years of teaching experience and were actively involved in curriculum planning and PAI instruction.

Secondary data were obtained from curriculum documents, lesson plans, madrasah profiles, administrative archives, and records of academic and religious activities (Moleong, 2014; Sujarweni, 2020). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the research focus, and further expanded through snowball sampling to enrich and deepen the data (Yakin, 2023).

To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation (Pratiwi et al., 2022; Moleong, 2014). Data trustworthiness was further strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria in accordance with qualitative research standards (Sugiyono, 2007;

Mahmud, 2011).

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analytical process was iterative and continuous, occurring throughout the research until data saturation was achieved (Miles et al., 1992; Sugiyono, 2017; Wijaya, 2018).

| RESULT | نتائج |

Integration of Character Values in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The research results indicate that the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo proceeds in a planned, systematic, and continuous manner. This integration is not only visible at the level of learning implementation but has also been designed since the curriculum planning stage. In the curriculum documents, character values are explicitly formulated in the learning objectives, core competencies, basic competencies, and indicators of competency achievement. This shows that the madrasah has positioned character education as an integral part of the formal curriculum, supporting Zubaedi's (2018) assertion that value internalization will be effective when systematically designed through curriculum documents rather than implemented as incidental practices.

This commitment was explicitly stated by the madrasah principal, who explained:

"From the beginning of curriculum planning, we intentionally include character values in learning objectives and lesson plans, because we believe academic achievement without character will not produce good outcomes." (Principal, Interview, 2025)

More specifically, the analysis of Lesson Plans (RPP) shows that character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, social care, and tolerance are clearly stated in the affective learning objectives. PAI teachers use these values as the basis for selecting materials, methods, and learning activities. One Aqidah Akhlak teacher stated:

"Before teaching, I always look at the character values listed in the lesson plan, so I can choose activities that train students' discipline and responsibility, not just deliver the material." (PAI Teacher, Interview, 2025)

This finding is consistent with Samani and Hariyanto's (2017) view that the curriculum serves as the main instrument of character formation, functioning as a normative reference for teachers in designing meaningful and value-oriented learning processes.

In classroom practice, character value integration is realized through consistently applied habituation strategies. Based on observations, learning activities routinely begin with joint prayer, recitation of *Asmaul Husna*, and reinforcement of disciplinary attitudes such as punctuality and classroom tidiness. These daily routines form a religious atmosphere that instills spiritual values and discipline in students. This process aligns with habituation theory in character education, which emphasizes that positive behaviors repeated consistently will gradually shape students' character (Muslich, 2011).

In addition to habituation, teacher modeling plays a central role in character integration. PAI teachers demonstrate polite communication, time discipline, and attitudes of mutual help and respect. Students were observed imitating these behaviors in daily interactions. One teacher

emphasized the importance of modeling by stating:

"Students learn more from what we do than from what we say. If teachers are disciplined and polite, students will naturally follow." (PAI Teacher, Interview, 2025)

This finding reinforces Lickona's (1992) argument that modeling is the core of character education, as children primarily learn moral values through imitation and observation of significant figures in their environment. Consistent with Hasanah's (2019) research, habituation and modeling are proven to be effective approaches for character formation at the elementary education level.

Beyond habituation and modeling, teachers integrate character values through contextualization of learning materials. In Aqidah Akhlak lessons on cleanliness, for example, teachers connect religious concepts with daily practices such as classroom cleaning duties and environmental care. Through shared responsibilities, students practice values of responsibility, cooperation, and social care. This experiential approach aligns with character education based on experiential learning, which emphasizes that values are more easily internalized when students are directly involved in real-life experiences (Muslich, 2011). Consequently, PAI learning develops across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, reflecting Lickona's (1992) framework of *knowing the good, feeling the good, and doing the good*.

Character value integration is further strengthened through a religious and conducive madrasah culture. Interviews with the madrasah principal reveal that internal policies emphasize character formation through madrasah rules and daily routines. Activities such as morning *tadarus*, communal work (*kerja bakti*), and weekly moral guidance reinforce character values beyond formal lesson hours. This indicates the application of an ecological approach to education, where the social environment functions as a medium for value education (Tilaar, 1999).

Local cultural values, particularly *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), are also utilized as sources of character learning. Communal activities become vehicles for instilling social care and cooperation, supporting Tilaar's (1999) view that character education must be rooted in local culture to ensure relevance to students' lives.

Extracurricular activities further strengthen character education. Activities such as routine recitations, *rebana*, and student organizations provide opportunities for students to practice leadership, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility. These findings affirm Lickona's (1992) assertion that the school community serves as a "laboratory of values" where students practice moral behavior through real social interaction.

The study also identified supporting and inhibiting factors in character value integration. Supporting factors include strong teacher commitment, religious madrasah culture, supportive internal policies, and parental involvement. Conversely, obstacles include limited PAI instructional time, high administrative burdens on teachers, varying levels of pedagogical competence, and low utilization of educational technology. This finding aligns with Rahman's (2021) study, which highlights limited technological competence as a major challenge in character education in the digital era.

From the evaluation perspective, a gap was found between curriculum planning and affective assessment practice. Teachers experience difficulties in developing systematic and measurable character assessment instruments, resulting in reliance on informal observation without adequate documentation. This supports Zubaedi's (2018) argument that affective

assessment is the most complex component of character education due to the challenge of measuring changes in attitudes and behavior consistently.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the integration of character values in the PAI curriculum at MI Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo has been comprehensive through the alignment of formal curriculum design, classroom practice, and madrasah culture. This multi-level integration model aligns with Lickona's (1992) comprehensive character education framework and is reinforced by Samani and Hariyanto (2017). Nevertheless, improvements are still required in the areas of character assessment, technology utilization, and teacher capacity building to ensure that character value integration can be implemented more optimally and sustainably.

Table 1. Integration of Character Values in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

Research Findings	Description
integration of character values in curriculum documents	Integration"The PAI curriculum explicitly includes character values (honest, disciplined, responsible, caring, tolerant) in learning objectives, Basic Competencies (KD), and Lesson Plans (RPP). Teachers have a clear normative foundation, supporting systematic character integration."
Integration of character values in Islamic Religious Education curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah	"Teachers consistently practice habituation such as prayer, Asmaul Husna, and classroom discipline. Teacher modeling (speech, disciplined attitude, mutual help) is a strong factor in students' character formation."
Contextualization of PAI material based on experience	"Teachers connect the material with real practices, such as classroom cleanliness, cleaning duty, and daily responsibility. This makes character values easier for students to understand and practice in daily life."
Madrasah culture and extracurricular activities as character strengtheners	"Religious culture, madrasah rules, morning tadarus, communal work, recitations, and rebana serve as an educational ecology that forms the values of discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and care."
Supporting-inhibiting factors and suboptimal character evaluation	"Supporting: teacher commitment, religious culture, parental support. Inhibiting: limited PAI hours, teacher administrative burden, varying teacher abilities, low technology utilization. Affective assessment is not systematic, so students' character development is poorly documented."

Based on the five main research findings, it can be concluded that the integration of character values in the PAI curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo proceeds comprehensively through the alignment of the formal curriculum, learning practice, and madrasah culture. The curriculum explicitly includes character values, while teachers implement them through habituation, modeling, and contextualization of material that encourages students to practice values in daily life. Madrasah culture and extracurricular activities also reinforce value internalization, although the implementation still faces obstacles such as limited learning time, administrative burden, and low technology utilization. In addition, affective assessment has not been optimal, thus requiring the strengthening of character evaluation instruments. Overall, the integration of character values has progressed well but requires improvement in the aspects of consistency, evaluation, and support for learning facilities.

Character Values Integrated into the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The research results show that the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah takes place in a multi-dimensional manner, encompassing curriculum objectives and indicators, classroom learning practices, and reinforcement through madrasah culture as well as co-curricular and extracurricular activities. This integration pattern indicates that character education is not positioned as an additional or

incidental program but as an inherent component of the entire madrasah education system. This finding reinforces the view of Samani and Hariyanto (2017), who assert that effective character education must be holistically integrated into curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and school culture to enable continuous internalization of values and comprehensive personality development.

At the curriculum document level, analysis of the syllabus, lesson plans (RPP), and PAI curriculum documents reveals that character values have been explicitly incorporated into learning objectives and basic competencies, particularly in Aqidah Akhlak and Fiqih subjects. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, politeness (*adab*), tolerance, cooperation, social care, and religiosity are reflected in learning outcomes emphasizing attitudes and behaviors. This demonstrates institutional awareness that PAI learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is not solely oriented toward cognitive achievement but also toward the formation of students' noble character.

However, a critical finding of this research is that the formulation of operational and measurable behavioral indicators is not yet uniform across grade levels. In many cases, character values remain expressed at a normative-conceptual level without clear behavioral descriptors that can guide assessment. This condition confirms Zubaedi's (2013) argument that character education curricula often emphasize value statements but lack operational clarity, resulting in difficulties during implementation and evaluation stages. Consequently, affective assessment in the madrasah tends to rely on daily observation, anecdotal notes, and teachers' subjective judgments, without standardized rubrics or systematic instruments. As a result, documentation of students' character development becomes fragmented and less useful for longitudinal evaluation and program improvement.

From a critical perspective, this gap reflects a structural tension between curriculum idealism and practical realities faced by teachers. On the one hand, the curriculum mandates comprehensive character integration; on the other hand, teachers face limited instructional time, heavy administrative workloads, and insufficient training in affective assessment. Muslich (2011) notes that character assessment is inherently complex because it involves gradual, contextual, and behavior-based changes. Without institutional support in the form of practical instruments and reduced administrative burdens, teachers may struggle to translate curriculum ideals into systematic evaluation practices. This dilemma highlights that weaknesses in character assessment are not merely individual teacher shortcomings but are embedded within broader structural constraints.

In classroom learning practice, PAI teachers employ various strategies to internalize character values, including teacher modeling, daily habituation, verbal reinforcement, and contextualization of learning materials. Teachers consistently demonstrate behaviors aligned with the values being taught, such as punctuality, politeness, fairness, and care for students. This finding aligns with Lickona's (1992) theory, which emphasizes that moral learning occurs primarily through observation and imitation of significant role models, particularly teachers.

Daily habituation serves as a central mechanism for character formation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Routine activities such as joint prayer, morning *tadarus*, orderly queuing, cleaning duties, and mutual greetings function as repeated moral practices that gradually form positive habits. Through consistent habituation, character values move beyond cognitive understanding toward internalized behavior. Hasanah (2019) supports this finding, asserting that continuous habituation at the elementary level is particularly effective due to students' high moral plasticity

during this developmental stage.

Teachers also contextualize PAI materials by linking religious teachings to students' daily experiences. For instance, lessons on cleanliness and *thaharah* in Fiqih are connected to practices of maintaining classroom and environmental cleanliness. This contextual approach helps students understand that Islamic teachings are not abstract doctrines but living values with concrete social implications. Tilaar (2003) emphasizes that education becomes meaningful when rooted in students' cultural and social realities, enabling authentic value internalization.

Madrasah culture plays a significant role in reinforcing character value integration. Religious routines, shared norms, and traditions of togetherness create a moral ecosystem that supports character learning. Madrasah rules, communal work (*gotong royong*), routine recitations, and socio-religious activities act as collective mechanisms of value internalization. Deal and Peterson (2009) describe school culture as a "hidden curriculum" that powerfully shapes students' attitudes and behaviors through lived values rather than formal instruction alone.

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities further strengthen character education by providing real social contexts for moral practice. Activities such as *tadarus*, *rebana*, and religious-based social programs cultivate responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and social care. These findings support Lickona's (1992) assertion that schools functioning as moral communities provide students with meaningful opportunities to practice moral actions in authentic settings.

Nevertheless, this research also reveals inhibiting factors that complicate character value integration. Internal constraints include limited instructional time for PAI, high administrative demands on teachers, and disparities in pedagogical competence related to value-based and experiential learning. Externally, inconsistencies between values taught in the madrasah and parenting practices at home weaken the continuity of character formation. Muslich (2011) stresses that character education requires strong synergy among schools, families, and communities; without this alignment, value internalization risks becoming fragmented.

Table 2. Character Values Integrated into the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

Research Findings	Description
Integration of character values is already included in the PAI curriculum document	"The curriculum includes values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and noble character in the attitude competencies, but not all are accompanied by operational behavioral indicators."
Modeling-based learning is the teacher's main strategy	"Teachers demonstrate behavior that serves as a direct example for students, such as being orderly, polite, disciplined, and honest. Modeling strongly influences value internalization."
Religious and social habituation is a means of value internalization	"Routines such as joint prayer, tadarus, queuing, cleaning duty, and sharing become media for forming students' moral habits."
Limitation of character assessment instruments	Character assessment is still subjective because there are no standard rubrics available to consistently measure students' behavior.
Local cultural context strengthens the relevance of character education	"Values of gotong royong (mutual cooperation), politeness, and consultation (musyawarah) are combined with Islamic values, making it easier for students to understand and practice noble character."

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings confirm the relevance of Lickona's (1992) comprehensive character education framework, encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. In the studied madrasah, moral knowing is evident in curriculum objectives and

learning materials; moral feeling is fostered through religious atmosphere and habituation; and moral action is realized through daily practices and social activities. However, the optimal integration of these three dimensions remains constrained by insufficiently operationalized indicators and underdeveloped affective evaluation systems (Zubaedi, 2013).

Overall, this research demonstrates that the integration of character values in the PAI curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has progressed well and shows strong potential for shaping students' moral behavior. Its main strength lies in the synergy between formal curriculum, teacher modeling, and religious-social habituation rooted in local cultural values. Nevertheless, refinement is needed in operational curriculum planning, development of structured character assessment systems, and enhancement of teachers' competencies in character education. Strategic efforts such as developing practical behavioral indicators, providing continuous professional development, reducing administrative overload, and strengthening collaboration with parents are essential to ensure that character education is implemented more systematically, critically, and sustainably (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017; Muslich, 2011).

DISCUSSION | مناقشة

The research results show that the integration of character values in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo is planned and comprehensive through three main domains: formal curriculum documentation, classroom learning practice, and madrasah culture. These three domains are not separate but interconnected, forming a unified system of continuous character education. This integration pattern confirms that character education is not positioned as an additional program or incidental activity but as an inherent part of the entire madrasah education process. This finding is consistent with the views of Lickona (1992) and Samani and Hariyanto (2017), who emphasize that character formation must be consciously designed through curriculum structure, pedagogical strategies, and a school environment that supports value internalization.

At the level of formal documentation, the analysis of the PAI curriculum and Lesson Plans (RPP) shows that character values have been listed in the formulation of learning objectives and basic competencies, especially in the subjects of Aqidah Akhlak and Fiqih. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, politeness (adab), tolerance, cooperation, social care, and religiosity are reflected in learning outcomes that emphasize the aspect of students' attitudes and behavior. This indicates institutional awareness that PAI learning at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is not only oriented toward the transfer of religious knowledge but also toward shaping students' noble character and Islamic personality. This finding strengthens Zubaedi's (2018) view that the formal curriculum is the main normative instrument in character education because it serves as the conceptual reference for teachers in designing value-based learning.

Nevertheless, this research found that the formulation of behavioral indicators in the curriculum document is not yet fully operational and uniform across grade levels. Some indicators are still formulated generally, such as "shows a disciplined attitude" or "practices honest behavior," without being accompanied by concrete descriptions of behavior that can be observed and measured objectively. This condition directly impacts the teachers' difficulty in conducting systematic and continuous character assessment. This finding aligns with the critique of Zubaedi (2018) and Muslich (2011), who state that many character education curricula are declarative and normative but do not provide technical guidelines in the form of applicable behavioral indicators and evaluation instruments.

From the theoretical perspective of Thomas Lickona, character education encompasses three main dimensions that are integrated: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The research results show that these three dimensions are present in the madrasah's educational practice, although the level of reinforcement is not yet fully balanced. The moral knowing dimension is reflected in the PAI curriculum material and objectives, which contain concepts of creed (aqidah), morals (akhlak), and Islamic values. The moral feeling dimension is evident through the habituation of joint prayer, moral guidance, the religious atmosphere of the madrasah, and teacher modeling that builds a positive emotional climate. Meanwhile, the moral action dimension is manifested in students' real behavior, such as time discipline, mutual help, responsibility for cleanliness, cooperation in group activities, and respectful attitude towards teachers and friends (Lickona, 1992).

These findings strengthen the argument that character education will not be effective if only delivered in the form of normative knowledge or moral lectures. Character values must be internalized through direct experience, habituation, and repeated practice in students' daily lives. Lickona (1992) asserts that true character is formed when students not only know what is good (knowing the good), but also desire that goodness (desiring the good) and practice it in real actions (doing the good). Thus, the existence of habituation practices and routine activities in the madrasah is a key element in the success of character education.

The integration between the formal curriculum and madrasah culture demonstrates the application of an ecological approach to character education. In this approach, the school or madrasah is viewed as a moral ecosystem in which values are transmitted through social interaction, collective habits, and cultural symbols. Deal and Peterson (2009) state that school culture functions as a hidden curriculum that indirectly, yet very strongly, shapes students' attitudes and behavior. The findings at MI Miftahul Huda Bonangrejo—such as joint prayer, morning tadarus, communal work, and Islamic extracurricular activities—show that madrasah culture is an effective medium for maintaining the consistency of character value internalization.

The results of this research are in line with recent empirical findings which indicate that Islamic schools that successfully build a religious culture tend to be more effective in forming students' character. Azhari (2024) and Ramatni (2025) found that the religious atmosphere, clear social rules, and collective habits based on Islamic values contribute significantly to the formation of students' disciplined attitudes, responsibility, and social care. Thus, madrasah culture does not only serve as a complement to the formal curriculum but becomes the primary space for practical character formation.

Another prominent aspect in the research findings is the contextualization of PAI learning material. Teachers relate lesson material, such as cleanliness, manners (adab), and responsibility, to real practice in the classroom and madrasah environment. This approach helps students understand the relevance of religious teachings to their daily lives. This contextual approach is consistent with Tilaar's (2003) view, which asserts that meaningful education must be rooted in the students' social and cultural context so that values can be understood and practiced authentically. Furthermore, recent studies indicate that the integration of character education should not be limited to PAI subjects but can be integrated into other subjects through value and context approaches. Djannah (2025) and Triono (2024) assert that cross-subject character education strengthens the consistency of value internalization because students encounter the same values in various learning contexts. This finding provides theoretical reinforcement for the contextualization practice found in this research.

CONCLUSSION | خاتمة

Although the integration of character values has progressed well, this research also reveals several significant challenges, especially in the aspect of character evaluation. Although affective objectives are included in the curriculum, systematic, valid, and reliable character assessment instruments are not yet available. Assessment is still dominated by informal observation and descriptive teacher notes without standard rubrics. This condition potentially leads to subjectivity and makes it difficult for the madrasah to map students' character development longitudinally. Zubaedi (2018) and Hadi (2025) assert that character assessment requires clear behavioral indicators, observation rubrics, and continuous monitoring so that the results can be academically accountable.

Other identified obstacles are the academic curriculum load, limited PAI learning time, and variation in teacher competence in applying character education pedagogy. Mailita (2019) and Ramatni (2025) show that the lack of teacher training and limited resources often become the main constraints in the implementation of character education in Islamic schools. Therefore, the results of this research indicate the need for the development of a more detailed operational curriculum, continuous teacher training, and the strengthening of collaboration between the madrasah and parents so that character education can proceed consistently and continuously.

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