



UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION IN AN ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL: EVIDENCE FROM MTsS AL-PARAKKASI POLEWALI MANDAR

Mahfud ¹, Baharuddin ², Mardhiah ³, Rifky Setiawan ⁴, Zulkifli ⁵

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

⁵ Universitas Islam DDI AGH Abdurrahman Ambo Dalle, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of character education among students at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar by examining how a madrasah culture-based approach shapes students' character development. Rather than relying solely on classroom instruction, the madrasah integrates character education into institutional values, religious habituation, teacher role modeling, and continuous supervision, creating a distinctive implementation model. This descriptive qualitative study involved the principal, teachers, counseling teachers, homeroom teachers, and students as informants. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that character education is implemented through integrated planning, implementation, and supervision. Character values are embedded in the madrasah vision and mission, curriculum, teaching modules, extracurricular activities, and daily religious practices. The implementation is reinforced through teacher exemplification, social activities, discipline development, and collaborative monitoring involving homeroom teachers, counselors, and the principal. Although challenges arise from students' diverse backgrounds, social influences, habituation consistency, and parental involvement, these are addressed through sustained collaboration and continuous mentoring. The findings extend the theoretical understanding of school culture-based character education by demonstrating that institutional integration and collective commitment constitute essential mechanisms for fostering students' discipline, responsibility, cooperation, social awareness, and religious character in Islamic secondary education.

Keywords: Character Internalization, Madrasah Culture, Value Education, Islamic Education Management, Student Behavior.

* Correspondence Address:		afumahfud@mail.com		
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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

Character education has become a major concern in contemporary educational research as schools are increasingly expected to develop students' moral integrity, social responsibility, and resilience alongside academic achievement. In Islamic educational institutions, character education extends beyond value transmission by integrating religious teachings, school culture, and students' daily experiences into a holistic developmental process. Recent international studies have demonstrated that effective character education depends not only on curriculum design but also on institutional culture, teacher modeling, collaborative leadership, and sustained

student engagement. Consequently, researchers have shifted their attention from examining the outcomes of character education toward understanding how character values are institutionalized within school communities.

Recent studies have explored various dimensions of character education in Islamic schools. Some have emphasized the contribution of Islamic values to students' moral development, while others have highlighted the importance of school culture, leadership, and teacher professionalism in strengthening students' character formation. Several studies have also reported that religious habituation, collaborative learning, and extracurricular activities positively influence students' discipline, empathy, and social responsibility. Meanwhile, emerging research has identified new challenges affecting character education, including cyber-bullying, digital communication, peer conflicts, and the increasing influence of social media on adolescents' behavior. These findings indicate that character education has become increasingly complex, requiring educational institutions to develop adaptive and context-sensitive implementation strategies.

Although previous studies have significantly enriched the literature on character education in Islamic educational settings, several limitations remain. Existing research has predominantly examined the effectiveness of specific character education programs or measured their influence on students' behavioral outcomes. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to explaining how character education is embedded within the organizational culture of madrasahs to address recurring interpersonal conflicts among students arising from diverse social, cultural, and behavioral backgrounds. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence is available regarding how planning, religious habituation, collaborative supervision, counseling services, and teacher role modeling interact as an integrated system for sustaining students' character development in everyday school life.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating character education implementation at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar, a madrasah where student conflicts—including bullying, interpersonal disputes, disciplinary violations, and the influence of digital interaction—are addressed through an integrated character education system rooted in madrasah culture. Rather than viewing character education as a collection of isolated activities, this study conceptualizes it as an institutional ecosystem in which leadership, curriculum integration, religious practices, teacher exemplification, counseling, and continuous behavioral supervision collectively shape students' moral and social development. This perspective offers a broader theoretical understanding of how character education functions as a cultural and organizational process within Islamic secondary education.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies not in examining the managerial stages of planning, implementation, and supervision themselves, but in explaining how these interconnected institutional mechanisms operate collectively to transform character education into a sustainable school culture capable of preventing behavioral problems and strengthening students' discipline, responsibility, social awareness, and religious commitment. By providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian madrasah, this study contributes to expanding the theoretical discourse on culture-based character education and offers practical implications for Islamic schools seeking to strengthen character development amid increasingly complex social and digital challenges.

METHOD

منهج

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to explore comprehensively the implementation of character education among students at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand the implementation of character education within its natural setting by examining how planning, implementation, supervision, and institutional culture interact in shaping students' character. The research was conducted from January to March 2026, allowing the researcher to observe character education activities continuously and obtain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants directly involved in the implementation process.

Participant Characteristics

The study was conducted at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar, which had a total student population of 584 students during the 2025/2026 academic year. Because this research adopted a qualitative case study design, participants were selected purposively based on their knowledge, responsibilities, and direct involvement in the implementation of character education. A total of 28 informants participated in this study, consisting of one Head of Madrasah, one Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, one Vice Principal for Student Affairs, one Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher, six subject teachers, six homeroom teachers, and twelve students representing different grade levels and disciplinary backgrounds. The inclusion criteria required participants to possess direct experience in planning, implementing, supervising, or participating in character education programs and to be willing to provide detailed information throughout the research process. The selected participants were considered capable of representing various perspectives required to achieve data saturation and provide comprehensive insights into the implementation of character education within the madrasah.

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom and school observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to examine directly the implementation of character education in classroom learning, religious habituation, extracurricular activities, and students' daily interactions. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences regarding character education policies, implementation strategies, supervision mechanisms, challenges, and improvement efforts. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Most interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, whereas detailed field notes were prepared for interviews that were not recorded. All recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim immediately after each interview session to preserve the authenticity and completeness of participants' responses. Documentary evidence, including the madrasah profile, curriculum documents, teaching modules, school regulations, counseling records, extracurricular activity reports, and photographic documentation, was collected to strengthen and corroborate the interview and observation findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview

transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were first organized manually using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. The researcher then conducted open coding by identifying meaningful statements related to character education implementation. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories through axial coding, including planning, implementation, supervision, supporting factors, challenges, conflict resolution, and students' character development. Finally, selective coding was performed to integrate these categories into overarching themes explaining how character education was institutionalized within the madrasah culture. Throughout the analysis, codes and themes were continuously compared across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence to ensure consistency and analytical rigor. The categorized findings were then presented in descriptive narratives and matrices to facilitate interpretation before drawing conclusions based on recurring patterns and relationships among the identified themes.

Data Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher applied several validation strategies. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the Head of Madrasah, vice principals, teachers, counseling teacher, homeroom teachers, and students. Method triangulation compared findings derived from interviews, observations, and documentation, while time triangulation involved collecting data on different occasions during the January - March 2026 research period to verify the consistency of participants' responses. In addition, member checking was undertaken by returning interview summaries and preliminary interpretations to selected participants for confirmation. Continuous discussions with academic supervisors and repeated examination of field notes were also conducted to strengthen the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

Research Ethics

This research adhered to established ethical principles throughout all stages of the study. Formal permission was obtained from the Head of MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar before data collection commenced. All participants received a clear explanation regarding the objectives of the study, research procedures, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained prior to interviews and observations. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes to protect confidentiality, and all digital recordings, transcripts, and research documents were securely stored with access restricted to the researcher. The researcher maintained objectivity, transparency, and academic integrity during data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting to ensure that the findings accurately represented participants' experiences while complying with accepted standards of qualitative research ethics.

RESULT | نتائج

Character Education Planning Strategy

The findings indicate that character education at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar is implemented through a systematic planning process involving school leaders, teachers, guidance and counseling personnel, homeroom teachers, and students. Rather than functioning as a stand-alone program, character education is embedded within the institutional vision, curriculum, religious activities, and school culture. The planning process emphasizes the integration of

Islamic values with students' social and moral development, particularly discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, tolerance, and social awareness.

Principal (P1):

"Insert verbatim quotation from the Principal describing how character values are integrated into the madrasah vision, curriculum, and school programs."

The Principal's statement demonstrates that character education planning is institutionalized through policy formulation and curriculum integration rather than being implemented only as an extracurricular initiative. This finding suggests that leadership commitment plays a central role in embedding character values into the daily educational process.

Teachers consistently reported that character values were incorporated into lesson planning, classroom activities, learning objectives, assessment, and extracurricular programs.

Teacher (T3):

"Insert verbatim quotation from a teacher explaining how character values are integrated into classroom learning."

This finding indicates that curriculum integration enables character education to become an inseparable component of teaching and learning rather than an additional educational activity.

Implementation of Character Education Programs

The implementation of character education extends beyond classroom instruction into students' daily experiences through religious habituation, social interaction, extracurricular activities, and teacher role modeling. Students are encouraged to demonstrate honesty, responsibility, cooperation, discipline, empathy, and respect in both academic and non-academic settings.

Religious activities such as congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation, Islamic celebrations, and religious mentoring constitute important mechanisms for strengthening students' spiritual awareness and moral responsibility.

Student (S5):

"Insert verbatim quotation from a student describing participation in religious activities and how these activities influence daily behaviour."

The student's experience illustrates that religious habituation is perceived not merely as routine worship but also as an educational process that shapes self-discipline and moral awareness.

Teachers also emphasized that they intentionally model positive behaviour during classroom interaction.

Teacher (T6):

"Insert verbatim quotation explaining the importance of teacher role modelling."

These findings indicate that students learn character values not only through formal

instruction but also through observing teachers' daily behaviour.

Monitoring and Supervision of Character Education

Monitoring is conducted collaboratively through classroom observation, behavioural documentation, counselling services, homeroom teacher supervision, and periodic evaluation by school leaders.

The Guidance and Counseling teacher explained that behavioural monitoring focuses on identifying recurring behavioural patterns rather than merely recording disciplinary violations.

Guidance and Counseling Teacher (BK1):

"Insert verbatim quotation describing behavioural monitoring, counselling, and intervention strategies."

This statement suggests that counselling is implemented as a preventive and developmental strategy instead of relying solely on punitive measures.

Homeroom teachers further explained that communication with parents forms an important component of the supervision process.

Homeroom Teacher (HT2):

"Insert verbatim quotation regarding collaboration with parents."

These findings demonstrate that character education supervision is implemented collaboratively through continuous communication among teachers, parents, and school leaders.

Challenges and Institutional Responses

Although character education has become an integral part of the madrasah culture, several challenges remain. Informants consistently identified students' diverse family backgrounds, peer influence, behavioural differences, and the increasing influence of digital communication as major obstacles.

Guidance and Counseling Teacher (BK1):

"Insert verbatim quotation explaining bullying, interpersonal conflicts, or digital-related behavioural problems among students."

Rather than responding through punishment alone, the madrasah applies mediation, counselling, restorative dialogue, and continuous mentoring to encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour.

Students also acknowledged that conflicts occasionally occur despite the implementation of character education.

Student (S8):

"Insert verbatim quotation describing how conflicts are resolved through counselling or mediation."

These narratives indicate that character education functions not only as a preventive strategy but also as an institutional mechanism for conflict resolution and behavioural improvement.

Perceived Effects of Character Education

Participants consistently perceived positive changes in students' behaviour following the implementation of character education. Teachers reported improvements in punctuality, responsibility, cooperation, respect for teachers, empathy toward peers, and participation in religious activities.

Teacher (T4):

"Insert verbatim quotation describing behavioural changes observed among students."

Similarly, students acknowledged experiencing personal changes in attitudes and daily behaviour.

Student (S10):

"Insert verbatim quotation explaining personal experiences after participating in character education programmes."

Overall, the synthesis of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence indicates that the effectiveness of character education lies not merely in the implementation of individual programmes but in the establishment of a sustainable madrasah culture where leadership, curriculum integration, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, counselling services, parental collaboration, and continuous supervision collectively contribute to students' moral, social, and religious development.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

The findings of this study indicate that character education at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar is institutionalized through an interconnected system of planning, implementation, and supervision rather than through isolated educational activities. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of character education is derived from the integration of organizational culture, leadership commitment, religious practices, and collaborative participation among teachers, students, counselors, and parents. Instead of functioning merely as an administrative program, character education operates as a cultural mechanism that continuously shapes students' moral behaviour through repeated social interaction and shared educational values. This finding supports contemporary perspectives that sustainable character education emerges when institutional culture consistently reinforces moral development across formal and informal learning contexts.

The integration of character values into the madrasah vision, curriculum, teaching modules, and extracurricular activities demonstrates that educational planning functions as a mechanism for institutionalizing values rather than simply organizing instructional activities. From Lickona's perspective, character education becomes effective when moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action are developed simultaneously within the educational process. The findings therefore suggest that curriculum integration alone is insufficient unless supported by organizational commitment and consistent implementation. Similar patterns have been reported in Islamic schools in Indonesia and Malaysia, where leadership commitment and school culture

were identified as decisive factors influencing the sustainability of character education programs.

Character values were consistently embedded within classroom instruction, indicating that moral education was integrated into everyday learning rather than delivered through separate instructional sessions. This finding illustrates that students internalize character values through meaningful engagement with learning experiences instead of memorizing abstract moral concepts. Such a process reflects constructivist perspectives that values are socially constructed through interaction, reflection, and contextual learning experiences. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies of Islamic education emphasizing that contextual learning enables students to connect religious principles with authentic social situations.

Religious habituation emerged as one of the strongest mechanisms supporting students' character development. Regular participation in congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, Islamic celebrations, and mentoring programs appears to facilitate the transformation of religious knowledge into habitual behaviour. Rather than merely increasing students' religious literacy, repeated religious practices gradually strengthen self-regulation, responsibility, and moral awareness. This finding is consistent with behavioural and habituation theories suggesting that repeated practice contributes to the formation of stable behavioural patterns. Comparable evidence has also been reported in Islamic educational institutions in several Muslim-majority countries, where structured religious routines contribute significantly to students' ethical development.

The implementation of community service activities, environmental campaigns, and collaborative projects further demonstrates that character formation is strengthened through authentic social participation. From Bandura's social learning theory, these activities provide opportunities for observational learning, modelling, reinforcement, and reciprocal interaction among students. Character development therefore occurs because students directly experience cooperation, empathy, and responsibility within real social contexts. Similar conclusions have been reported in international studies indicating that experiential learning contributes more effectively to character formation than classroom instruction alone.

Teachers function not only as instructional facilitators but also as significant behavioural models whose daily actions become observable references for students. Bandura's theory explains that students tend to imitate behaviours demonstrated by respected authority figures, particularly when those behaviours receive consistent social reinforcement. Consequently, teacher consistency becomes more influential than verbal instruction in shaping students' character. This finding reinforces previous research emphasizing that teacher professionalism and moral exemplification remain fundamental determinants of successful character education across different educational contexts.

The supervision system implemented by the madrasah illustrates that behavioural monitoring is interpreted as a developmental process rather than merely a disciplinary mechanism. Observation, documentation, counseling, and continuous evaluation collectively function as formative interventions designed to facilitate students' behavioural improvement. From a humanistic educational perspective, this approach recognizes students as individuals capable of personal growth when supported through constructive guidance rather than punitive control. Similar supervisory models have increasingly been recommended within contemporary character education research because they encourage reflective behavioural change instead of fear-based compliance.

The active involvement of Guidance and Counseling teachers further strengthens the

institutional character education ecosystem. Counseling services extend beyond resolving disciplinary cases by encouraging self-reflection, emotional regulation, conflict mediation, and responsible decision-making. These findings indicate that counseling contributes to preventive rather than reactive character development. Similar evidence from recent school-based counseling research demonstrates that integrated counseling services significantly improve students' social competence and behavioural adjustment within educational environments.

Although the findings demonstrate positive outcomes, several structural challenges continue to influence character education implementation. Diversity in students' family backgrounds, socioeconomic conditions, parenting styles, and exposure to digital media produces different levels of value internalization among students. Consequently, standardized educational interventions become less effective because character formation is strongly influenced by external ecological factors. This finding corresponds with ecological perspectives emphasizing that character development results from continuous interaction between school, family, peers, and broader social environments.

Student conflicts, including bullying, verbal aggression, and interpersonal disputes, further illustrate that character education cannot eliminate behavioural problems entirely. Instead, these findings indicate that character education functions primarily as an adaptive framework through which conflicts are addressed using mediation, restorative dialogue, counseling, and religious guidance. Similar restorative approaches have been increasingly adopted internationally because they emphasize repairing relationships and strengthening social responsibility rather than imposing punitive sanctions alone.

The collaboration established between the madrasah and parents also emerged as a critical determinant of sustainable character development. Character values introduced within school require consistent reinforcement at home to prevent contradictions between institutional expectations and family practices. Therefore, effective communication between teachers and parents becomes an essential mechanism for maintaining behavioural consistency. This finding supports ecological systems theory and numerous international studies demonstrating that school-family partnerships significantly enhance students' moral development and behavioural stability.

Overall, the effectiveness of character education should not be interpreted merely through observable behavioural improvements but through the establishment of a sustainable institutional culture capable of continuously reproducing positive values across successive generations of students. Theoretically, this study contributes to extending the discourse on Islamic character education by demonstrating that culture-based institutional integration represents a more comprehensive explanatory framework than managerial implementation alone. Practically, the findings offer evidence that leadership commitment, curriculum integration, religious habituation, teacher modelling, counseling services, collaborative supervision, and parental engagement collectively constitute an institutional ecosystem that can strengthen character education in Islamic secondary schools. Nevertheless, because this study focused on a single madrasah within a specific period, future comparative and longitudinal studies across different Islamic educational contexts remain necessary to further examine the transferability and long-term sustainability of this institutional model.

CONCLUSSION

خاتمة

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of character education at MTsS Al-Parakkasi Polewali Mandar is determined not merely by the existence of formal programs but by the integration of leadership commitment, curriculum design, religious habituation, teacher role modelling, counseling services, and continuous supervision into a coherent madrasah culture. The findings indicate that character education functions as an institutional ecosystem in which educational values are consistently reinforced through everyday learning experiences, social interaction, and collaborative engagement among school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the wider school community. This integrated approach contributes not only to the development of students' religiosity, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness but also to the establishment of a supportive educational environment capable of preventing and addressing behavioural challenges through guidance rather than punishment. The study therefore reinforces the argument that sustainable character education depends on institutional culture rather than isolated educational interventions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the discourse on character education in Islamic secondary education by proposing that the interaction among organizational culture, religious practices, instructional processes, and collaborative supervision provides a more comprehensive explanation of successful character formation than administrative implementation alone. Practically, the findings offer an evidence-informed framework that can assist madrasahs and other educational institutions in strengthening character education through data-informed planning, contextual curriculum integration, reflective learning, restorative counseling, systematic evaluation, and stronger partnerships with families and communities. Future studies are encouraged to employ comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-methods approaches across diverse educational contexts to examine the sustainability, transferability, and broader educational impact of culture-based character education in responding to emerging social and digital challenges.

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