

Layered Formation and the Compounding Gap: How Religious Values Shape Akhlak Karimah in an Indonesian State Madrasah

Rts. Novi Atul Ambiya

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi
ratulambiya@gmail.com

Ely Surayya

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi
elysurayya@uinjambi.ac.id

Dewi Hasanah

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi
dewihasanh@uinjambi.ac.id

Hindun

State Islamic University of Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi
hindunjambi@gmail.com

Sachrawi Hidayat

Islamic University of Malang
sachrawihidayat499@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Rts. Novi Atul Ambiya

Article history: Received: March 26, 2026 | Revised: April 25, 2026 | Available Online: June 30, 2026

Abstrack

This study examines how religious values are implemented to form *akhlak karimah* (noble character) in an Indonesian state madrasah, which pedagogical and institutional strategies mediate that implementation, and which factors enable or constrain it. The study adopts a descriptive-phenomenological case design at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Batanghari, Jambi. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with the principal, three teachers, and six students purposively selected across grade levels; three weeks of non-participant observation; and analysis of institutional documents. Two coding cycles produced descriptive and thematic categories. Trustworthiness was addressed through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. Implementation operated as three functionally differentiated layers: curricular integration supplied doctrinal grammar; programmatic habituation supplied disciplined repetition; and cultural embedding through the 5S practice (Smile, Greet, Salute, Polite, and Courteous) supplied relational texture. Four strategies recurred: non-negotiable habituation, modeling paired with real-time theological framing, documented pastoral oversight, and family partnership. The aspiration-behavior gap was produced not by institutional deficiency but by the compounding interaction of heterogeneous prior formation, asymmetric family engagement, and socio-digital counter-formation. The study re-specifies *Uswah Hasanah* as a dynamic pedagogical mechanism rather than a static institutional property, and argues that performance indicators for state madrasahs should register the conditional nature of character-formation outcomes. Differentiated pastoral pathways, realistic family-partnership redesign, and explicit engagement with the digital moral environment emerge as the most actionable institutional moves.

Keywords: akhlak karimah; character formation; habituation; *Uswah Hasanah*; digital moral environment.

Copyright: © 2026. The authors.

FIKROTUNA; Jurnal Pendidikan dan Manajemen Islam is licensed under a Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial 4.0 International License

Introduction

Islamic education has long been understood as a project of integrated personhood, in which the cultivation of intellect is inseparable from the formation of moral and spiritual disposition.¹ Within this tradition, *akhlaq karimah*, the settled disposition toward virtuous conduct, is the defining purpose of education rather than an outcome appended to it.² The Qur'anic affirmation of the Prophet's "great moral character" (*khuluqin 'azim*, Q.S. al-Qalam: 4) and the Prophetic mission to perfect noble character (*li-utammima makarima al-akhlaq*) set a standard that contemporary Islamic educational institutions are still expected to meet. The pedagogical question, however, is no longer whether character formation is central to Islamic education, but how it can be made effective under conditions that differ markedly from those in which classical pedagogies were formulated.³

Institutionally, according to Rohman et al.⁴ and Aminullah et al.,⁵ Madrasah Aliyah serves as a bridge between the national education system and the pesantren tradition by integrating religious and general education curricula. At the same time, according to Abdurrohman & Khori, madrasahs are mandated to integrate Islamic values into their curricula, teaching methods, and school culture. Recent scholarship documents how Indonesian madrasahs discharge this mandate through several mechanisms: a hidden curriculum embedded in daily santri activity,⁶ the institutionalization of "mental revolution" values across state Islamic senior high schools,⁷ the internalization of moral

¹ R Q Amarullah, "Implementation Of Targîb and Tarhîb Methods to Teach Aqidah and Akhlaq Subject in Madrasah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2021): 217–28, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v7i2.15480>.

² A Syamsul, H Miftachul, and M Nur Hayati, "Developing Akhlaq Karimah Values Through Integrative Learning Model in Madrasah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2023): 41–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v0i0.24443>.

³ Nadri Taja et al., "Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model through Islamic Education," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 11 (2021): 132–53.

⁴ A Rohman et al., "Integrating Traditional-Modern Education in Madrasa to Promote Competitive Graduates in the Globalization Era," *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2268456>.

⁵ Aminullah Aminullah et al., "The Impact of Madrasah Integration in the National Education System on the Academic Quality of Madrasah Aliyah Alumni in South Sulawesi," *Ulumuna* 28, no. 2 (2024): 1017–48, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v28i2.1091>.

⁶ N S Alamin et al., "Hidden Curriculum in Students' Activities at Modern Islamic Boarding School: Phenomenology Study at Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School, Ponorogo, East Java," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 48, no. 1 (2024): 57–72, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v48i1.1134>.

⁷ Warul Walidin et al., "Beyond Classroom Learning: Institutionalizing Mental Revolution Values in Indonesian State Islamic Senior High Schools," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 14, no. 2 (May 30, 2026): 1465–86, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i2.1355>.

values through ritual habituation such as the dawn *halaqah*,⁸ and multicultural institutional practices that treat character formation as a transformative rather than a merely doctrinal project.⁹ Comparative evidence further suggests that integrated Islamic schools tend to outperform their secular counterparts on character indicators. However, the effect is conditional on the quality of habituation and teacher modeling rather than on institutional label.¹⁰ Taken together, this body of work shifts the governing question from which values madrasahs should teach to how those values become stable dispositions in daily school life, a process recent evidence shows to be simultaneously cognitive and emotional rather than purely behavioral.¹¹

Yet the conditions for that translation have grown more demanding. Adolescents now inhabit a hybrid moral environment in which madrasah norms compete with peer cultures and transnational media flows.¹² Platform-mediated content compounds this environment, frequently contradicting the institution's ethical framing.¹³ Studies of Singapore's madrasa show that the digital sphere does more than distract; it reshapes how students interpret what they are taught.¹⁴ Similar patterns appear in Indonesian Islamic secondary schools.¹⁵ Schools struggle to govern this terrain. Analysis of secondary-school

⁸ H Noor et al., "Beyond Ritual Practice: Moral Value Internalization through Dawn *Halaqah* in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2026): 93–108, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v9i1.262>.

⁹ S Sumadiyah, Maskuri, and J Mistar, "Institutional Practices of Multicultural Islamic Education in Fostering Conscious Character and Peacebuilding," *Kharisma* 5, no. 1 (2026): 187–202, <https://doi.org/10.59373/kharisma.v5i1.175>.

¹⁰ Islamiani Safitri et al., "Character Education in Indonesia: Do Integrated Islamic Schools Outperform Public Schools?," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 16, no. 1 (June 27, 2025): 251–70, <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2025.2.251.271>.

¹¹ R Kurniawan et al., "Islamic Emotional-Cognitive Integration: How Islamic Education Shapes Students' Cognitive Processes and Outcomes through Expressive Writing," *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2523385>.

¹² Imtihanatul Ma'isyatuts Tsalitsah, Muhammad Wahid Nur Tualeka, and Carlos Lazaro Prawirosastro, "Global Trends in Adolescent Development and Their Impact on Islamic Education Systems: A Psychoeducational Review and Progressive Islamic Values Perspective," *Proceeding International Symposium on Global Education, Psychology, and Cultural Synergy* 2, no. 1 SE-Emerging Issues in Education and Youth Development (December 26, 2025): 450–58, <https://doi.org/10.30651/psychoseries.v1i1.28749>.

¹³ Ulil Amri Syafri and Hanafiah Bin Budin, "Teachers, Parents, and the Digital Challenge: Understanding Islamic Character Formation in Singapore's Madrasa Education," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 3 SE-Articles (October 27, 2025): 627–42, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i3.239>.

¹⁴ Ali Kuswadi et al., "Educational Management Model for Transforming Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era: Integrating Religious Literacy and 21st-Century Competencies," *Berkala Ilmiah Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 SE-Articles (March 30, 2026): 280–88, <https://doi.org/10.51214/bip.v6i1.1936>.

¹⁵ Brady Robards, James Goring, and Natalie Ann Hendry, "Guiding Young People's Social Media Use in School Policies: Opportunities, Risks, Moral Panics, and Imagined Futures," *Journal of Youth Studies* 29, no. 4 (April 21, 2026): 492–508, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2468477>.

social-media policies finds them torn between protective prohibition and the moral panics such prohibition reproduces, leaving students unprepared to act well online.⁴ Empirical modeling reinforces this concern: the association between religious instruction and reduced deviant behavior is weaker than the rhetoric of madrasah identity implies, revealing a persistent gap between programmatic intent and behavioral outcome.¹⁶ The same gap surfaces in institutional climate, where intolerance persists even in formally religious settings.¹⁷ Character formation in the contemporary madrasah is therefore a contested process, not a guaranteed product of institutional design.

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Batanghari, in Jambi Province, is an instructive case for examining this contested process. Preliminary observation reveals an established repertoire of practice: congregational Zuhr prayer, daily tadarus al-Qur'an, commemorative observances such as Maulid al-Nabi and Isra' Mi'raj, and a pervasive 5S habituation culture (Smile, Greet, Salute, Polite, and Courteous). At the same time, the institution exhibits the aspiration–behavior gap described in the recent literature: episodes of disciplinary non-compliance, discourteous conduct, and uneven engagement with religious activities indicate that the implementation system, though systematic, is not uniformly internalized. This combination of structured implementation and uneven outcome is precisely what makes MAN 2 Batanghari analytically productive. The question is less whether religious values are taught than how their internalization is shaped by curricular integration, programmatic habituation, school culture, and the wider socio-digital environment in which students live.

The study addresses three questions: (1) How are religious values implemented in the formation of akhlak karimah at MAN 2 Batanghari? (2) What pedagogical and institutional strategies does the madrasah employ in cultivating akhlak karimah? (3) What factors enable or constrain the implementation process?

To address these questions, the analysis is organized around a framework that connects the classical Islamic account of moral formation with contemporary educational theory. Three constructs structure the inquiry. The first specifies the outcome that character education seeks: akhlak karimah, understood as an internalized disposition

¹⁶ Hasan Basri et al., “Tarbiyyah Ruhiyyah and Deviant Behavior in Islamic Schools: An Empirical Sem-Based Study,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 14, no. 1 SE-Articles (n.d.): 371–92, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i1.2549>.

¹⁷ M T Yani et al., “The Phenomenon of Intolerance in Islamic Educational Institutions (Madrasahs): An Analysis of Its Manifestations, Causes, and Prevention Policies,” *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 9, no. 7 (2026).

rather than a record of compliant behavior. The second specifies the process through which that disposition is cultivated: a layered formation in which curricular, programmatic, and cultural work are mutually constitutive rather than additive. The third specifies why the process so often falls short of its aspiration: a compounding interaction among the several environments in which adolescents are formed. Within this architecture, *Uswah Hasanah*, the pedagogy of the exemplary model, is re-specified as a dynamic mechanism rather than a static institutional property.

Akhlak karimah is an internalized disposition. Classical Islamic moral psychology locates character not in isolated acts but in the settled condition of the soul from which acts proceed. Al-Ghazali defines *khuluq* as a firmly established state (*hay'a rasikha*) of the soul that gives rise to conduct spontaneously, without prior deliberation, and treats the disciplining of the soul (*riyada al-nafs*) as the means by which praiseworthy traits are acquired and ignoble ones displaced.¹⁸ Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* makes the educational corollary explicit: character is not fixed by nature, but alterable, and its refinement proceeds through sustained habituation and training.¹⁹

On this view, akhlak karimah is reached only when virtuous conduct has become second nature, performed for its own sake, and as readily when unobserved as when supervised. This distinction between internalized disposition and outward compliance is the framework's analytical pivot. It implies that observed misconduct within a religiously committed institution is not, in itself, evidence that values have gone untaught; it may instead indicate that internalization remains incomplete and the disposition not yet stabilized. The criterion of success is therefore the spontaneity and durability of virtuous conduct, not its frequency under observation a position consistent with recent evidence that moral values consolidate through habituated practice students experience as personally meaningful Noor et al.,²⁰ and through processes that are at once cognitive and emotional Kurniawan et al.,²¹ The indicators conventionally used in madrasah assessment

¹⁸ A H al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul (Kitab Riyadat Al-Nafs) and on Breaking the Two Desires (Kitab Kasr Al-Shahwatayn): Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din)* (Islamic Texts Society, 1995).

¹⁹ A Ibn Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhib Al-Akhlaq)* (American University of Beirut, 1968).

²⁰ Noor et al., "Beyond Ritual Practice: Moral Value Internalization through Dawn *Halaqah* in Islamic Boarding Schools."

²¹ Kurniawan et al., "Islamic Emotional-Cognitive Integration: How Islamic Education Shapes Students' Cognitive Processes and Outcomes through Expressive Writing."

taqwa, *tawadhu*, *sidq*, *mas'uliyah*, and discipline are best read as observable traces of this underlying disposition rather than as the disposition itself.

Layered formation: curriculum, program, and culture as mutually constitutive. The framework treats the three mandated dimensions of madrasah life not as parallel delivery channels but as mutually constitutive layers, each supplying something the others cannot. Curricular integration supplies doctrinal grammar: the conceptual content and scriptural justification that explain why a given disposition is obligatory and good. Programmatic activity supplies disciplined repetition: the structured, recurring practice through which a known value is rehearsed until it begins to operate automatically. Cultural embedding supplies relational texture: the everyday social environment in which the value is modeled, expected, and normalized, so that acting well becomes a condition of belonging.

Habituation is the engine that links the layers. Its theoretical warrant is the classical claim that disposition follows from repeated practice, as al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh state: a person becomes truthful by repeatedly telling the truth and disciplined by repeatedly submitting to discipline. The Islamic tradition adds a condition that separates this from mere behavioral conditioning: the repeated act is joined to intention (*niyya*), so that habituation is simultaneously an act of worship orienting the agent toward God. Much of the cultural layer operates as a hidden curriculum, transmitting values through daily activities and teachers' conduct rather than through explicit instruction.²² The first theoretical claim that follows is that internalization depends on the alignment and mutual reinforcement of all three layers, and that a deficit in any one cannot be fully offset by strength in the others: doctrinal grammar without disciplined repetition yields knowledge that never becomes habit; repetition without relational texture yields compliance that does not survive the removal of supervision.

Uswah hasanah as a dynamic pedagogical mechanism. The pedagogy of the exemplary model is grounded in the Qur'anic designation of the Prophet as an excellent example (*uswa hasana*, Q.S. al-Ahzab: 21). It is conventionally understood as teaching by embodiment. In much of the literature, however, *uswah hasanah* is treated as a static property, an attribute the virtuous teacher possesses. The framework re-specifies it as a dynamic mechanism. Observational learning shapes conduct only under specifiable

²² Alamin et al., "Hidden Curriculum in Students' Activities at Modern Islamic Boarding School: Phenomenology Study at Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School, Ponorogo, East Java."

conditions: the learner must attend to the model, retain what is observed, be able to reproduce it, and be motivated to do so.²³ *Uswah hasanah* becomes formative when embodiment is coupled with real-time framing: the teacher not only acts well but also, in the moment, supplies the theological and moral reasons that render the modeled conduct intelligible and worth adopting, and models in ways that are responsive to how particular students are actually behaving. So understood, the exemplary model is an interaction between teacher and student rather than a fixed quality of the teacher, and its effectiveness is contingent rather than guaranteed.

The compounding gap: ecological misalignment and socio-digital counter-formation. Character is not formed within the school alone. The adolescent is situated in a set of nested environments, the madrasah, the family, and the peer and digital sphere, whose formative influences either converge or conflict.²⁴ Internalization is consolidated when these environments reinforce one another and eroded when they diverge. The framework's third claim concerns the form that divergence takes: where the environments are misaligned, their effects do not simply add but compound. Heterogeneous prior formation means the school's program meets students at markedly different starting points, so that a uniform regimen produces uneven uptake. Asymmetric family engagement removes, for many students, the domestic reinforcement that would otherwise consolidate the disposition the school is cultivating. And the socio-digital environment supplies active counter-formation: platform-mediated content that does not merely distract but reshapes how students interpret what they are taught. Institutional responses to this terrain frequently default to protective prohibition, which tends to reproduce moral panic rather than cultivate online moral agency Robards et al.,²⁵ leaving a persistent gap between programmatic intent and behavioral outcomes that strong institutional commitment alone cannot close.²⁶

²³ Albert Bandura and Richard H Walters, *Social Learning Theory*, vol. 1 (Englewood cliffs Prentice Hall, 1977).

²⁴ Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, vol. 352 (Harvard university press, 1979).

²⁵ B Robards, J Goring, and N A Hendry, "Guiding Young People's Social Media Use in School Policies: Opportunities, Risks, Moral Panics, and Imagined Futures," *Journal of Youth Studies* 29, no. 4 (2026): 492–508, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2468477>.

²⁶ Basri et al., "Tarbiyyah Ruhhiyyah and Deviant Behavior in Islamic Schools: An Empirical Sem-Based Study."

This reasoning yields the framework's conditionality thesis. Because character-formation outcomes depend on the alignment of layers within the school and of environments beyond it, those outcomes cannot be inferred from institutional design or religious label alone, a conclusion consistent with comparative evidence that the advantage of integrated Islamic schooling is contingent on the quality of habituation and modeling rather than on institutional type.²⁷ The study's first question, on the forms of implementation, is read through layered formation; the second, on strategy, through the mechanisms of habituation and dynamic *uswah hasanah*; and the third, on enabling and constraining factors, through the compounding gap. Internalization is the outcome the framework holds in view, layered habituation is the means it specifies, and ecological misalignment is the explanation it offers for shortfall.

Research Methods

The study adopts a qualitative design with a descriptive–phenomenological orientation. This orientation is appropriate because the research questions concern not only the observable mechanics of religious-value implementation but the meaning that implementation carries for those who enact and undergo it. Phenomenological inquiry seeks to describe the meaning of a lived experience as it is actually experienced, holding the researcher's preconceptions in check so that the phenomenon is rendered on its own terms.²⁸ Here, that experience is the formation of *akhlak karimah* as it is lived by the principal who sets institutional policy, the teachers who carry it into daily practice, and the students in whom the disposition is meant to take hold. The framework set out above supplied the interpretive lens for the analysis; it was not used to predetermine what participants would report.

Fieldwork was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Batanghari, a state Islamic senior high school in Desa Sukaramai, Kecamatan Muara Tembesi, Kabupaten Batang Hari, Jambi Province. The site was selected purposively for two reasons. First, the madrasah operates a well-developed and visible program of religious habituation, congregational Zuhur prayer, daily *tadarus al-Qur'an*, commemorative observances, and a pervasive 5S culture, making the layered implementation of religious values evident in

²⁷ Safitri et al., “Character Education in Indonesia: Do Integrated Islamic Schools Outperform Public Schools?”

²⁸ B Bado, *Model Pendekatan Kualitatif: Telaah Dalam Metode Penelitian Ilmiah* (Tahta Media Group, 2022).

practice. Second, the institution exhibits the aspiration–behavior gap that motivates the study: a structured formation system coexists with uneven student uptake. This pairing of systematic implementation and conditional outcome is what makes the site analytically productive rather than merely illustrative.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, in which informants are chosen for their direct knowledge of and involvement in the phenomenon under study.²⁹ Ten participants were recruited across three role-defined categories. The madrasah principal served as the key informant on institutional policy, strategy, and the rationale behind the formation program. Three teachers, including teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and of character education, informed the pedagogical dimension of implementation: how religious values are taught, modeled, and reinforced in classroom and co-curricular settings. Six students drawn from across grade levels informed the experiential dimension: how the madrasah's religious formation is received, interpreted, and either internalized or resisted. Sampling students from different year groups was deliberate, allowing the account to capture variation in prior formation and in the degree of internalization, rather than reflecting the perspective of a single cohort.

Data were generated through three complementary techniques. *Semi-structured interviews* were conducted individually with each participant using a guide organized around the three research questions, with latitude to pursue themes that participants themselves raised. The protocol moved from the forms of religious-value implementation, to the strategies the madrasah employs, to the factors participants saw as helping or hindering the formation of character. *Non-participant observation* was carried out over three weeks: the researcher attended the madrasah's religious activities and observed ordinary school interaction without taking part, recording field notes on both the conduct of activities and the interpersonal behavior, greetings, courtesies, compliance, and disengagement through which religious values are, or are not, enacted. *Document analysis* covered the school rules (*tata tertib*), the religious-activity calendar, activity reports, and photographic records of religious events. Combining the three techniques allowed each

²⁹ R O Santina, F Hayati, and R Oktariana, “Analisis Peran Orangtua Dalam Mengatasi Perilaku Sibling Rivalry Anak Usia Dini,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa* 2, no. 1 (2021): 1–13.

line of evidence to be examined against the others, so that findings rested on convergence across data sources rather than on any single method.³⁰

Analysis proceeded through two coding cycles.³¹ In the first cycle, interview transcripts, field notes, and document excerpts were coded closely and descriptively, condensing the raw material into meaning units that remained close to participants' own language and the observed particulars. In the second cycle, these initial codes were classified, compared, and consolidated into the broader thematic categories that structure the findings. The second-cycle categories correspond to the study's three questions: the forms of implementation, the strategies of cultivation, and the enabling and constraining factors, and were interpreted through the framework's constructs of layered formation, dynamic *uswah hasanah*, and the compounding gap. Coding moved iteratively between the data and these categories, and deviant instances of students who disengaged from activities the institution treats as universal, for example, were retained and examined rather than set aside, since such cases are central to an account of conditional internalization.

The credibility and dependability of the findings were addressed through four procedures associated with naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Source triangulation compared accounts across the principal, teachers, students, and documents, so that claims about implementation did not rest on a single vantage point. Technique triangulation compared what was said in interviews against what was observed in practice and recorded in institutional documents. Member checking returned the researcher's interpretations to participants for confirmation or correction, guarding against the imposition of meanings participants would not recognize. An audit trail documented the sequence of analytic decisions, from initial codes through to final themes, so that the path from data to conclusion remains traceable and open to scrutiny.

Research Findings

The findings are organized according to the three research questions and the constructs developed above. The first section discusses the implementation of religious values across three mutually reinforcing layers. The second section outlines the madrasah's strategies for fostering akhlak karimah, with the real-time integration of

³⁰ J W Creswell and J D Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2018).

³¹ J Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2021).

exemplary role models and a theological framework serving as its primary mechanism. The third section identifies conditions that support implementation as well as factors that limit its outcomes. It explains the gap between the institution's goals and the character of students that is consistently formed.

Layered formation: three mutually reinforcing layers

The implementation of religious values at MAN 2 Batanghari occurs at three levels: curricular, programmatic, and cultural. Each level contributes something that the others do not, and they are interdependent so that they function to shape character, rather than merely existing passively.

1. Curricular integration: doctrinal framework

The curricular layer provides conceptual content and references to sacred texts as a rational foundation for religious behavior. Religious values are first introduced into formal education through the subject of Islamic Religious Education, the Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah and Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic History, which provides the doctrinal vocabulary to name, justify, and understand character. This integration extends to other subjects through a thematic approach: science teachers relate the order of the universe to divine wisdom, math teachers connect accurate and honest calculations to trustworthiness, and language teachers refer to texts from the Qur'an. This layer explains to students what religious dispositions are and why they must be practiced, but for the most part, it remains in the realm of knowledge.

2. Programmatic conditioning: regular repetition

The programmatic component transforms that knowledge into practice through a fixed schedule of religious activities. The most consistent of these is the congregational zuhr prayer, which gathers the entire school community in the prayer room at midday, thereby fulfilling the obligation to pray on time, practicing congregational worship, and instilling punctuality. Daily Qur'an recitation opens the school day, so the academic day begins with the recitation of the Qur'an. Celebrations such as Maulid al-Nabi and Isra' Mi'raj mark the calendar with a collective affirmation of Islamic identity. What this layer adds is repetition: the same actions, at the same time, by everyone, until their performance becomes routine. Knowledge alone is insufficient for this; only structured repetition can achieve it.

3. Cultural differentiation: relational texture

The cultural layer provides an everyday social medium in which values are not merely known and practiced but also expected. The most visible form of this is the 5S protocol, smile, greeting, greeting others, politeness, and courtesy, which requires every community member to greet others with a smile and an Islamic greeting, speak respectfully to teachers and elders, and interact politely. This protocol is simple, but it makes polite and respectful behavior a daily norm rather than an occasional display. Teachers' example reinforces this: during observations, teachers wore modest Islamic attire, greeted others politely, arrived on time for lessons and prayers, and actively participated in religious activities rather than merely observing from a distance. This approach instills these attitudes into the web of relationships that students navigate throughout the day.

The 5S culture is also evident in informal interactions outside the classroom. As soon as the recess bell rings, a group of students chatting in the hallway automatically lowers their voices and bows slightly as a teacher walks by. The teacher responds with a smile and a brief greeting: "*Have you all bought snacks yet?*" That moment demonstrates a sense of respect that is not stiff but remains warm and friendly. In another corner, a student who accidentally bumped into a classmate immediately apologized with a smile (observation data from recess).

The three layers are interdependent; they do not function in isolation. Without the curricular layer, religious practice loses its framework and becomes unreflective. Without the programmatic layer, knowledge remains passive and is never put into practice. Without the cultural layer, the curriculum and programs are confined to class hours and scheduled activities, failing to extend throughout the school day. The cultural layer serves as a bridge, carrying religious hope into the unstructured intervals untouched by formal instruction or scheduled worship. When these three layers reinforce one another, religious values are present, expected, and practiced simultaneously. The following section discusses why this convergence is not uniformly reflected in students' character.

Character-building strategies

Beneath this structural layer, four strategies recurred in participants' accounts and observed practices. These strategies represent the madrasah's conscious choices in

pursuing character development. While the layers describe what is done, the strategies describe how the institution works to ensure that these practices truly take root.

1. Non-Negotiable Habits

The first and most fundamental strategy is that core religious practices are not optional. Daily recitation of the Qur'an, congregational prayer, and the 5S protocol are observed every day by every student, without exception. Madrasah leaders view this consistency as a requirement for enrollment at the school, not a feature that can be chosen selectively. According to the participants, disposition is formed only through regular and inevitable repetition; practices carried out only when time permits do not produce the automaticity required for character development. Consistency here does not mean rigidity, but rather a prerequisite for habit formation.

"At this madrasah, daily prayers and the 5S program are mandatory, not just activities to be done if there's time. I always tell teachers and parents that there are no exceptions. Whether they're the children of foundation officials, top students, or even those who frequently break the rules, everyone is subject to the same rules. Every day, all students are required to participate, without exception. If we relax this practice, it will ultimately become nothing more than a formality. Character is shaped through consistent routine." (Interview with the Madrasah Principal)

2. Setting an example integrated with a theological framework in real time

The evidence points to the second strategy as the most decisive. This strategy expands the conventional understanding of *uswah hasanah*. Teachers do not stop at modeling the behavior they expect; in their daily interactions, they also explain the theological and moral reasons behind it, citing verses from the Qur'an, hadiths, and Islamic moral reasoning, so that religious values appear not as externally imposed rules, but as expressions of dignity and purpose bestowed by Allah. Exemplary behavior demonstrates how to act; theological explanations demonstrate why that behavior is worthy of emulation. The two work together: actions become understandable as they are performed, and the expectations placed on students are explained rather than assumed. It is this combination, not merely the presence of a virtuous teacher, that gives the act of modeling its formative power. The following interview with a fiqh teacher illustrates this theological framework.

"I often remind the children, especially when they start to seem inattentive. 'Kids, we smile and greet others, not so that outsiders will praise our madrasah for being well-disciplined. Remember the Prophet's hadith: *al-birru husnul khuluq*, righteousness is good character. When you lower your voice in front of your

teacher, or greet your friends with a salam, you are seeking Allah's pleasure by honoring your fellow human beings.' So I don't want them to see these 5S principles as a burden of discipline. This is worship; it has its basis in Islamic teachings, and it is integral to their self-respect as Muslims." (Interview with a Fiqh/Akhlak Teacher)

Interviews with students paint the same picture:

"At first, when we were reminded or urged to say hello every morning, it felt awkward, like we were just going through the motions. But over time, we realized that the teachers here don't just give orders; they're the first to set an example. If we make a mistake or forget, the way they correct us doesn't make us feel inferior or result in an immediate demerit. The teachers always explain the impact it has on us, linking it to good manners, for example, 'if you act this way, the blessings of your knowledge will be lost.' Explanations like that make us think, 'Oh, that's right.' So we do it not because we're afraid of being punished, but because we understand the benefit it brings to ourselves." (Interview with a 12th-grade student)

3. Documented pastoral supervision

The third strategy involves monitoring each student's behavior and intervening when necessary. A comprehensive code of conduct governs attire, punctuality, behavior during prayer, and social conduct, with tiered consequences for violations. Homeroom teachers and Islamic Education teachers combine these rules with personal attention: they monitor each student's religious and moral development, identify those who are struggling, and provide specialized guidance. Behavioral records and pastoral guidance records allow the school to identify patterns that emerge over time and respond before problems escalate. This kind of oversight provides the flexibility that uniform habit formation and modeling lack; at this point, the program adapts to each student's needs.

"Through the behavior log, we can immediately see if a child's performance is starting to decline, for example, a child who's usually diligent suddenly starts arriving late, or becomes lackadaisical about praying in congregation. But here, we don't immediately deduct points for infractions. Usually, I invite the child to sit down and talk one-on-one during break time. We gently probe to find out what the real problem is. Often, a child acts out because they're carrying a 'burden' from home, or because of a conflict with a friend, and they're unsure who to turn to. This is where a personal approach comes in. We first address their emotional needs, and only then do we correct their behavior in accordance with school rules." (Interview with a PAI Teacher & Homeroom Teacher)

4. Partnership with Families

The fourth strategy extends beyond the school walls. Madrasah leaders view families as an irreplaceable element in character development and strive to connect the values taught at school with those practiced at home. Madrasahs keep parents informed about their children's religious development, invite them to religious events, and provide guidance to reinforce religious practices at home. Parent-teacher meetings are used to discuss character development, not just academic progress, and to seek parental support. This strategy, by its very design, acknowledges that schools cannot accomplish character development on their own.

Enabling Conditions and the Escalation of Structural Inequality

The final question: why does this well-established implementation system fail to produce consistent results? The answer lies not in institutional shortcomings but in the interaction among conditions that institutions can and cannot control.

Four conditions underpin the strength of this implementation. First, institutional commitment: school principals affirm akhlak karimah as a non-negotiable goal and personally exemplify it, so that character development is understood as the responsibility of all parties, not only PAI teachers, but also other educators, administrators, and support staff. Second, competent and committed teaching staff: most combine formal qualifications in Islamic studies with personal religious commitment, two elements necessary to carry out the program with authority. Third, community trust: the madrasah's established reputation generally makes families willing to align with its religious expectations. Fourth, physical infrastructure: worship facilities, recitation rooms, and a layout that facilitates congregational prayer; without these, the practice of religious habits cannot be widely implemented. Together, these conditions systematically and clearly implement the research site.

However, these conditions do not guarantee uniform internalization, as the three inhibiting factors interact with one another rather than merely coexisting. First, students' diverse religious backgrounds: some come from devout families, some are merely nominal believers, and others are not religious at all, so a uniform program faces vastly different starting points, motivations, and levels of family support. Second, uneven family involvement: despite partnership strategies, many parents, especially those constrained by long work hours or limited education, cannot provide the at-home reinforcement

essential to the program's success; some do not even practice the 5S ethics or maintain routines for prayer and Quran recitation at home. Third, the counter-narrative from the digital world: students spend most of their time outside of school on social media, which prioritizes appearance, popularity, and consumption rather than the humility, self-control, and seriousness instilled by the madrasah. This exposure risks disconnecting school compliance from the inner values that are actually formed elsewhere.

This behavioral disparity was most evident during transitional moments. When the call to prayer for Zuhur rang out, and most students headed to the mosque, the researcher observed an 11th-grade student deliberately separating himself from the crowd and hiding behind a booth in the empty cafeteria.

From a distance, the student was completely engrossed in his smartphone: his fingers were rapidly scrolling through TikTok videos depicting an urban lifestyle and patterns of excessive consumption, a stark contrast to the value of simplicity that had just been taught in class. As soon as he realized he was being watched and reprimanded, he immediately put his phone away, his expression turning defensive.

This incident reflects a broader pattern: the "duality of space" within students. Physically, they are in a madrasah environment that emphasizes discipline and religious values. Still, their cognitive and affective attention is diverted to a digital space that offers a value system at odds with what the school is trying to instill.

Incidents like this are not isolated occurrences but rather a pattern that educators at the school have long been aware of. To explore these findings further, the researchers interviewed a Guidance and Counseling teacher, who explained as follows:

"The biggest challenge right now is fighting against social media algorithms, to be honest. At school, we teach manners, humility, and appropriate social boundaries. But as soon as they get home, what they see on their phones is influencers flaunting their popularity, wealth, and unlimited freedom. Ironically, the very things we consider breaches of etiquette at school actually earn likes and praise in the digital world. This gap is widening because there's no one at home speaking up. Parents are busy working, so they tend to be neglectful; ultimately, child-rearing is handed over to the phone's algorithms. In the end, it's like carving on water what we've built from morning until noon can crumble in a matter of hours because of social media."

These teachers' observations and accounts confirm the existence of "two worlds" that students navigate: their bodies are at the highly disciplined madrasah, but their attention is drawn to the digital realm, whose values are actually at odds with what is taught there.

The power of these three factors lies in how they interact with one another. Weak foundational training leaves school programs standing on shaky ground. Uneven family involvement eliminates the reinforcement at home that should consolidate what the school has built. The digital environment then fills that void with content that runs counter to school norms. Students with the weakest foundational development typically also receive the least reinforcement at home and are most exposed to conflicting influences. The gap between aspirations and behavior is the result of these mutually reinforcing interactions, not the result of a single cause or institutional failure.

The fourth condition limits the institution's capacity to address these interactions. Islamic Education (PAI) teachers work under the time pressures common in Indonesian secondary education: a packed curriculum, large class sizes, and a heavy administrative burden. These conditions leave little room for personalized pastoral engagement, and even less for monitoring spaces outside of school and in the digital realm where counter-narratives are most potent. The challenge is not that institutions lack appropriate strategies, but rather that the personal attention required by this situation exceeds currently available capacity.

Discussion

The case of MAN 2 Batanghari presents a puzzle that the descriptive literature on Islamic character education does not fully resolve: an institution can implement religious values systematically across every dimension of school life and still fall short of forming the intended disposition in a portion of its students. This study's contribution is to specify why. Read through the framework developed earlier, and the evidence yields three claims. The familiar tripartite model of implementation is better understood as a functionally differentiated system than as a set of parallel channels. The pedagogy of the exemplary model, *Uswah Hasanah*, is better understood as a dynamic mechanism than as a static institutional property. And the gap between aspiration and behavior is better understood as the product of a compounding ecological misalignment than as a residual that better implementation would erase. Together, these claims support a conditionality thesis with direct implications for how the character-formation work of state madrasahs is measured and supported.

From a tripartite checklist to a functionally differentiated system.

That effective religious-value implementation integrates curriculum, program, and culture is well established; Indonesian studies across school types report that formation is strongest where values are embedded simultaneously in formal learning, structured activity, and the wider school environment. Findiyani,³² Mardliyah et al.,³³ The present findings confirm this pattern but reframe what the integration consists of. The three layers at MAN 2 Batanghari were not interchangeable contributions to a common total; each supplied a distinct function that the others could not. Curricular integration supplied doctrinal grammar, the knowledge of what a disposition is and why it is owed, but in the register of cognition, which on its own does not become habit. Programmatic habituation supplied disciplined repetition, the mechanism by which classical Islamic ethics holds that a settled disposition is acquired at all, as al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh, yet repetition without justification risks routine without reflection. Cultural embedding supplied relational texture, carrying religious expectation into the unstructured intervals that lessons and timetables do not reach, much of it through the hidden curriculum of daily conduct and teacher example.³⁴

The refinement matters because it changes what "integration" claims to entail. An additive reading treats the three dimensions as cumulative goods, such that more of each yields more character. A functional reading treats them as complementary and non-substitutable, such that a deficit in one cannot be offset by surplus in another: doctrinal grammar without disciplined repetition produces students who can articulate virtues they do not practice, and repetition without relational texture produces compliance that lapses the moment supervision is withdrawn. This specifies the condition that the existing model leaves implicit. It is not the quantity of religious provision that forms character, but the mutual reinforcement of its three functions, and it is the cultural layer, least amenable to curricular planning and least visible in formal documentation, that does most to hold the system together.

³² Findiyani, "Implementasi Budaya Religius Dalam Pembentukan Akhlakul Karimah Peserta Didik Di MI Darun Najah Onggorawe Sayung Demak Tahun Ajaran 2022/2023" (Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2023).

³³ M Mardliyah, M Sulistiono, and M Muslim, "Implementasi Nilai Religius Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Peserta Didik Melalui Kegiatan Keagamaan Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *JPMI: Jurnal Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 6, no. 3 (2024): 46–55.

³⁴ Alamin et al., "Hidden Curriculum in Students' Activities at Modern Islamic Boarding School: Phenomenology Study at Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School, Ponorogo, East Java."

***Uswah hasanah* is a dynamic mechanism.**

The study's principal theoretical move concerns the exemplary model. In much of the literature, and in the self-understanding of many institutions, *uswah hasanah* is treated as a property: the institution that employs virtuous teachers possesses it, and possession is taken to suffice for transmission. The evidence from MAN 2 Batanghari does not support that equation. Modeling became formative not when teachers embodied religious values, but when embodiment was paired with real-time theological framing, in which the teacher, in the moment of acting, supplied the reasons that rendered the act intelligible and worth adopting, and adjusted to how particular students were responding.

This pattern is what a closer reading of observational learning would predict. Modeling shapes conduct only when the observer attends to the model and is motivated to reproduce what is observed; the mere presence of a model, however exemplary, guarantees neither.³⁵ Real-time framing is precisely the work of securing attention and supplying motivation: it tells the student why this conduct, performed by this teacher, has a claim on them. On this account, *uswah hasanah* is not an attribute a teacher has but an interaction a teacher conducts, and its effectiveness is contingent on the quality of that interaction rather than on the teacher's virtue alone. The re-specification carries two consequences. First, it explains a phenomenon that static reading cannot: why institutions staffed by committed, observably pious teachers nonetheless exhibit the aspiration–behavior gap. Where modeling is present but framing is thin or inconsistent, the conditions for internalization are not met, and observed virtue in teachers does not transfer. The point is consonant with evidence that the most effective religious educators combine consistent behavioral expectation with a compelling moral vision rather than relying on example alone.³⁶ Second, it relocates *Uswah Hasanah* from the category of fixed institutional assets to that of pedagogical practice, which can be developed, supported, and made more consistent. An institution cannot readily manufacture virtuous teachers, but it can cultivate the framing and responsiveness that convert their example into formation.

³⁵ Bandura and Walters, *Social Learning Theory*.

³⁶ E T Nopitasari and R N Setyowati, "Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Pembentukan Akhlak Religius Siswa Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Magetan," *Journal of Civics and Moral Studies* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jcms.v6n2.p1-16>.

The compounding gap: ecological misalignment, not implementation residual.

The third contribution concerns the gap itself. A growing body of work documents that religious schooling does not reliably produce the conduct its rhetoric promises: the association between religious instruction and reduced deviance is weaker than madrasah identity implies, Basri et al.,³⁷ and intolerance and disengagement appear even in formally religious settings.³⁸ The dominant tendency is to read such shortfalls as a problem of implementation, a sign that the program is not yet good enough. The present findings locate the gap differently. At MAN 2 Batanghari, implementation was not deficient; the gap arose from the interaction of three counter-formative conditions beyond the institution's full control.

The decisive feature is that these conditions compound rather than add. Heterogeneous prior formation gives the school's program uneven material to work with; asymmetric family engagement withdraws the domestic reinforcement that would consolidate the disposition the school cultivates, Gunawan et al.,³⁹ and the socio-digital environment supplies active counter-formation, content that does not merely distract but reshapes how students interpret what they are taught. An ecological reading clarifies why their joint effect exceeds their sum. The adolescent is formed across nested environments whose influences either reinforce or undercut one another, Bronfenbrenner,⁴⁰ When they are misaligned, each deficit deepens the others. The student least equipped by prior formation tends to be the same student least reinforced at home and most exposed to contrary influences, so the three factors converge on the same individuals rather than being distributed evenly across the cohort. The behavioral expression of this convergence is the split the findings noted: outward conformity at school over an inner orientation formed elsewhere, which is to say compliance without internalization, exactly the outcome the framework's central distinction anticipates.

This reframing has a critical edge. Much of the field infers character formation from the presence of a well-run program, treating implementation and internalization as if they

³⁷ Basri et al., "Tarbiyyah Ruhyyah and Deviant Behavior in Islamic Schools: An Empirical Sem-Based Study."

³⁸ Yani et al., "The Phenomenon of Intolerance in Islamic Educational Institutions (Madrasahs): An Analysis of Its Manifestations, Causes, and Prevention Policies."

³⁹ S Gunawan, T Noor, and A Kosim, "Pembentukan Karakter Religius Melalui Program Hafal Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 6, no. 2 (2022): 11812–18, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v6i2.4323>.

⁴⁰ Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*.

were the same. Separating them shows that they can diverge sharply, and that the divergence is patterned rather than random. The madrasah's responses to the digital environment illustrate the difficulty. Where schools meet that environment with protective prohibition, the response tends to reproduce moral panic rather than build the online moral agency students actually need. Robards et al.,⁴¹ prohibition governs conduct within the school's reach and leaves untouched the sphere where counter-formation is strongest.

Conditionality and the measurement of madrasah performance.

The three contributions converge on a single thesis. Character-formation outcomes are conditional: on the mutual reinforcement of the implementation layers within the school, on the dynamic quality of modeling, and on the alignment of the environments beyond the school in which students are also formed. Outcomes, therefore, cannot be inferred from institutional design or religious label. This is consistent with comparative evidence that the character advantage of integrated Islamic schooling holds only conditionally, depending on the quality of habituation and teacher modeling rather than on institutional type.⁴² A committed, well-implemented program is necessary for formation; it is not sufficient in itself.

The implication for measurement is direct. If the effectiveness of a madrasah's character work is judged by indicators that count the number of prayers held and programs run. Rules in place, the assessment will register implementation while remaining silent on internalization. It will be treated as an institutional success or failure, an outcome that is, in substantial part, conditional on factors the institution does not control. Indicators built for this work would need to do two things that the current emphasis on structured provision does not.⁴³ They would distinguish internalization from compliance by attending to conduct in unstructured settings, responses to ethical dilemmas, and students' capacity to articulate and defend their commitments, rather than to attendance and observed performance alone. And they would register the conditional and distributed

⁴¹ Robards, Goring, and Hendry, "Guiding Young People's Social Media Use in School Policies: Opportunities, Risks, Moral Panics, and Imagined Futures," 2026.

⁴² Safitri et al., "Character Education in Indonesia: Do Integrated Islamic Schools Outperform Public Schools?"

⁴³ A S Prayoga and I K Sahri, "Transformasi Karakter Religius: Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Agama Islam Pada Standar Ubudiyah Dan Akhlakul Karimah (SKUA)," *Tawazun: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 17, no. 2 (2024): 315–30, <https://doi.org/10.32832/tawazun.v17i2>.

character of outcomes, crediting an institution for the formation it achieves given the ecological conditions it faces rather than holding it to a uniform standard that assumes those conditions away. To measure character formation as if it were wholly within institutional control is to mismeasure it.

Practical implications.

Three institutional moves follow from this analysis, each addressing a point at which the compounding gap is most tractable. The first is a shift from uniform to differentiated pastoral provision. A program applied identically to students arriving from sharply different starting points will, by the logic of the findings, reproduce the gap; the heterogeneity that constrains formation can be met only by varying the intensity and kind of support, directing more sustained attention to students whose prior formation and home reinforcement are weakest, including through structured peer mentoring by students in whom the disposition is more settled. The second is a realistic redesign of family partnership.

The current model presupposes a domestic capacity for religious reinforcement that many families, for reasons of time and schooling, lack; a partnership that merely informs such parents will not consolidate what the school builds. Redesign would mean scaffolding low-capacity households with concrete, low-burden practices and, where the home cannot reinforce the school, compensating for that absence within the institution rather than assuming a continuity that does not hold. The third is explicit engagement with the digital environment rather than prohibition. Since counter-formation operates most strongly in the sphere that the school least controls, equipping students to act well within it through morally framed media literacy that names the value conflicts they encounter and reasons through them, addresses the gap where it is actually produced rather than displacing it to a space that prohibition cannot reach.

Limitations and boundary conditions.

Several boundaries qualify these claims. The study examines a single state madrasah, and its findings are offered as analytically transferable rather than statistically generalizable; the value of the site lies in its ordinariness neither a metropolitan flagship nor an elite *pesantren* of the kind that has dominated the literature (Alamin et al., 2024), but the sort of institution in which most Indonesian Muslim adolescents are actually educated which is what makes the conditional-internalization finding broadly relevant.

The depth of access constrains the account of students' inner experience; the fieldwork allowed three weeks of observation and a modest number of student interviews, which establish the conditions and mechanisms of formation more securely than they capture the texture of internalization as students themselves live it. The design describes the formation system and the factors bearing on it; it does not track outcomes over time, and so cannot establish whether, or for whom, internalization is ultimately achieved. Each boundary marks a direction for inquiry that the conditionality thesis renders pressing.

Conclusion

This study asked how MAN 2 Batanghari implements religious values in forming akhlak karimah, which strategies mediate that implementation, and what enables or constrains it. The school pursues religious formation through its curriculum, a structured program, and school culture, but the resulting disposition varies among students. Explaining that variation revises three assumptions common in the descriptive literature.

First, curriculum, program, and culture form a differentiated system, not a checklist of separate inputs. Curriculum supplies the vocabulary for naming and justifying character. The program provides the repetition that turns knowledge into a habit. Culture carries religious expectation through the unstructured parts of the day, and surplus in one layer cannot make up for a deficit in another. The cultural layer is the least visible in formal planning, and it does the most to hold the system together.

Second, *uswah hasanah* depends on what a teacher does, not on what the institution has. Modeling became formative only when teachers paired their example with real-time theological explanation and adjusted it based on how individual students responded. A teacher conducts this interaction; the institution does not own it, and the interaction's quality determines its effect. That is why schools with committed, visibly pious teachers can still see a gap between what is modeled and what students actually become.

Third, the gap traces back to three conditions that reinforce one another rather than to any failure of implementation: uneven prior religious formation, uneven family reinforcement, and a digital environment that rewards the opposite of what the school teaches. These conditions compound rather than add, converge on the same students, and produce outward compliance without inner conviction. Together, these findings suggest that character formation depends on how the layers reinforce each other, on the quality of modeling, and on alignment with environments beyond the school. A well-run program

is necessary but not sufficient. Assessing programs by activity counts alone misses this; schools need indicators that separate internalization from compliance, along with differentiated pastoral care, more realistic family partnerships, and direct engagement with digital life rather than prohibition. As a single-site study, this one is a starting point, inviting longitudinal and comparative work on how, and for whom, internalization actually takes hold.

Bibliography

- Abdurohman, M, and Ahmad Khorri. "The Transformation of Moral Education through Strategic Management Based on Islamic Values." *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan dan Keislaman* 14, no. 3 (2025): 931–42. <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v14i3.2445>.
- Al-Ghazali, A H. Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul (Kitab Riyadat Al-Nafs) and on Breaking the Two Desires (Kitab Kasr Al-Shahwatayn): Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' *Ulum Al-Din*). Islamic Texts Society, 1995.
- Alamin, N S, Z S Rahmawati, M Br. Maha, S Nisa', and A Zalzuli. "Hidden Curriculum in Students' Activities at Modern Islamic Boarding School: Phenomenology Study at Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School, Ponorogo, East Java." *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 48, no. 1 (2024): 57–72. <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v48i1.1134>.
- Amarullah, R Q. "Implementation Of Targîb and Tarhîb Methods to Teach Aqidah and Akhlaq Subject in Madrasah." *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2021): 217–28. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v7i2.15480>.
- Aminullah, Aminullah, Mujahidin Mujahidin, Ahmad Yussuf, Syahabuddin Syahabuddin, and Kasjim Salenda. "The Impact of Madrasah Integration in the National Education System on the Academic Quality of Madrasah Aliyah Alumni in South Sulawesi." *Ulumuna* 28, no. 2 (2024): 1017–48. <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i2.1091>.
- Bado, B. *Model Pendekatan Kualitatif: Telaah Dalam Metode Penelitian Ilmiah*. Tahta Media Group, 2022.
- Bandura, Albert, and Richard H Walters. *Social Learning Theory*. Vol. 1. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1977.
- Basri, Hasan, Muslikhin, Rizka Husnu Maulana, and Mohammad Aqil Baihaqi. "Tarbiyyah Ruhhiyyah and Deviant Behavior in Islamic Schools: An Empirical SEM-Based Study." *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 14, no. 1 SE-Articles (n.d.): 371–92. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i1.2549>.
- Bronfenbrenner, Urie. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Vol. 352. Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Creswell, J. W., and J. D. Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th ed. SAGE Publications, 2018.
- Findiyani. "Implementasi Budaya Religius dalam Pembentukan Akhlakul Karimah Peserta Didik di MI Darun Najah Onggorawe Sayung Demak Tahun Ajaran 2022/2023." Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2023.
- Gunawan, S, T Noor, and A Kosim. "Pembentukan Karakter Religius Melalui Program Hafalan Al-Qur'an." *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 6, no. 2 (2022): 11812–18. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v6i2.4323>.
- Ibn Miskawayh, A. *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhib Al-Akhlaq)*. American

- University of Beirut, 1968.
- Kurniawan, R, I. K. Bakti, M Firmansyah, R Bahri, N Kholis, and Kusaeri. "Islamic Emotional-Cognitive Integration: How Islamic Education Shapes Students' Cognitive Processes and Outcomes through Expressive Writing." *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2523385>.
- Kuswadi, Ali, Feri Riski Dinata, Ermayanti, Dwi Novianti, and Moh. Solikul Hadi. "Educational Management Model for Transforming Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Era: Integrating Religious Literacy and 21st-Century Competencies." *Berkala Ilmiah Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 SE-Articles (March 30, 2026): 280–88. <https://doi.org/10.51214/bip.v6i1.1936>.
- Mardiyah, M., M. Sulistiono, and M. Muslim. "Implementasi Nilai Religius Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Peserta Didik Melalui Kegiatan Keagamaan Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah." *JPMI: Jurnal Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 6, no. 3 (2024): 46–55.
- Noor, H, Murdan, Muhdi, E Susilawati, G N M R Kartika, and Suraijiah. "Beyond Ritual Practice: Moral Value Internalization through Dawn *Halaqah* in Islamic Boarding Schools." *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2026): 93–108. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v9i1.262>.
- Nopitasari, E T, and R N Setyowati. "Implementasi Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Pembentukan Akhlak Religius Siswa Di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Magetan." *Journal of Civics and Moral Studies* 7, no. 2 (2021): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jcms.v6n2.p1-16>.
- Prayoga, A S, and I K Sahri. "Transformasi Karakter Religius: Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Agama Islam Pada Standar Ubudiyah Dan Akhlakul Karimah (SKUA)." *Tawazun: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 17, no. 2 (2024): 315–30. <https://doi.org/10.32832/tawazun.v17i2>.
- Robards, B, J Goring, and N A Hendry. "Guiding Young People's Social Media Use in School Policies: Opportunities, Risks, Moral Panics, and Imagined Futures." *Journal of Youth Studies* 29, no. 4 (2026): 492–508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2468477>.
- Robards, Brady, James Goring, and Natalie Ann Hendry. "Guiding Young People's Social Media Use in School Policies: Opportunities, Risks, Moral Panics, and Imagined Futures." *Journal of Youth Studies* 29, no. 4 (April 21, 2026): 492–508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2468477>.
- Rohman, A, S Muhtamiroh, A Imron, and N Miyono. "Integrating Traditional-Modern Education in Madrasa to Promote Competitive Graduates in the Globalization Era." *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2268456>.
- Safitri, Islamiani, Erna Andriyanti, Rizli Ansyari, Risma Delima Harahap, Laili Habibah Pasaribu, Rofiqoh Hasan Harahap, and Muhammad Istiqlal. "Character Education in Indonesia: Do Integrated Islamic Schools Outperform Public Schools?" *Journal of Education, Culture and Society* 16, no. 1 (June 27, 2025): 251–70. <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs2025.2.251.271>.

- Saldaña, J. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 4th ed. SAGE, 2021.
- Santina, R O, F Hayati, and R Oktariana. “Analisis Peran Orang Tua Dalam Mengatasi Perilaku Sibling Rivalry Pada Anak Usia Dini.” *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa* 2, no. 1 (2021): 1–13.
- Sumadiyah, S, Maskuri, and J Mistar. “Institutional Practices of Multicultural Islamic Education in Fostering Conscious Character and Peacebuilding.” *Kharisma* 5, no. 1 (2026): 187–202. <https://doi.org/10.59373/kharisma.v5i1.175>.
- Syafri, Ulil Amri, and Hanafiah Bin Budin. “Teachers, Parents, and the Digital Challenge: Understanding Islamic Character Formation in Singapore’s Madrasa Education.” *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 3 SE-Articles (October 27, 2025): 627–42. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i3.239>.
- Syamsul, A. H. Miftachul, and M Nur Hayati. “Developing Akhlak Karimah Values Through Integrative Learning Model in Madrasah.” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2023): 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v0i0.24443>.
- Taja, Nadri, Encep Syarief Nurdin, Aceng Kosasih, Edi Suresman, and Tedi Supriyadi. “Character Education in the Pandemic Era: A Religious Ethical Learning Model through Islamic Education.” *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 11 (2021): 132–53.
- Tsalitsah, Imtihanatul Ma’isyatuts, Muhammad Wahid Nur Tualeka, and Carlos Lazaro Prawirosastro. “Global Trends in Adolescent Development and Their Impact on Islamic Education Systems: A Psychoeducational Review and Progressive Islamic Values Perspective.” *Proceeding International Symposium on Global Education, Psychology, and Cultural Synergy* 2, no. 1 SE-Emerging Issues in Education and Youth Development (December 26, 2025): 450–58. <https://doi.org/10.30651/psychoseries.v1i1.28749>.
- Walidin, Warul, Imran Imran, Darwani Darwani, and Sulaiman Sulaiman. “Beyond Classroom Learning: Institutionalizing Mental Revolution Values in Indonesian State Islamic Senior High Schools.” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 14, no. 2 (May 30, 2026): 1465–86. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i2.1355>.
- Yani, M T, M Hazin, A Ahmadi, Y Hanafi, N W D Rahmawati, S Ladiqi, and K Saiban. “The Phenomenon of Intolerance in Islamic Educational Institutions (Madrasahs): An Analysis of Its Manifestations, Causes, and Prevention Policies.” *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 9, no. 7 (2026).