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RELIGIOUS CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: MADRASAH HEADS' STRATEGIES IN EDUCATING STUDENTS IN BANDUNG

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ABSTRACTS

Background: The degradation of character among students has become a critical issue in many educational settings, especially within Islamic schools, where moral and spiritual development is paramount. Character education, particularly in religious contexts, plays a crucial role in shaping students into responsible and ethical individuals. **Purpose:** This study examines the strategies employed by Madrasah heads in Bandung to develop the religious character of their students, addressing the challenges posed by the ongoing degradation of character among youth. The cultivation of religious character is central to creating morally responsible and spiritually grounded individuals. This research aims to explore the policy formulation, implementation strategies, and evaluation processes employed by Madrasah leaders to foster religious character development. **Method:** Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion. **Result:** The findings reveal that religious character formation is supported by habituation programs, such as Madrasah literacy, extracurricular activities, Qur'an recitation, prayer routines, and the 5S method (Smile, Greetings, Politeness, Cleanliness, and Orderliness). These activities, alongside regular evaluations, contribute to creating a disciplined and respectful environment. **Conclusion:** The research highlights the importance of leadership commitment and collaborative efforts in effectively implementing character education, suggesting that a strategic approach to character development can lead to positive changes in student behavior and spiritual growth.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The contents of the introduction are the fundamental matters or the urgency of the problem, which is the background for writing the study/research, written in Constantia 12 font.

Character is a characteristic that distinguishes between one human being and another. Character is a basic thing that every human being has (Arthur et al., n.d.; Nurilhaq & Tabroni, 2022). Nowadays, there are many cases of moral deterioration that occur in Indonesia. One of them is the crisis in the world of education. Many students often skip school, the proliferation of a culture of cheating on the participants, cases of brawls between students, and so on. A phenomenon that occurred recently was that a student at a madrasa in Blitar Regency, East Java, allegedly beat his friend with his bare hands to death. This persecution allegedly occurred in the classroom and was witnessed by his classmates. This incident occurs when there is no teacher in the classroom. This incident occurred in August 2023. This fact has become one of the proofs of the low character value of students so that actions that harm other parties arise. This incident is also one of the proofs of moral decline in educational institutions that should be pioneers of character change (Apriyanto & Hidayati, 2022).

This fact proves the lack of character cultivation in students. Therefore, it is very necessary to cultivate character from an early age which can start from the family, Madrasah, and community environment. Islam education must be applied at an early age so that students do not forget their duties in this world, to worship Allah Swt and stay away from His prohibitions, and not to neglect their duties as Muslim individuals who must carry out the Great Mandate. And Islamic education is useful for students in the future. By increasing the worship of students, we can make them become better individuals, and have good role models, because teachers are examples that students will do, and they always remember Allah Swt.

The above incident is related to program management that needs to be considered by the leadership of educational institutions (Deming et al., 2013; Duhan et al., 2017). A good program governance process will be able to reduce or even eliminate this tendency. There must be a policy that is carefully studied by involving various parties. Policies must be implemented consistently through credible organizational structures and responsible persons. The process of evaluating and improving character development standards must also be carried out consistently, programmatically, and continuously. This process is often referred to as the foundation of program quality which is the basis for measurable changes in organizational behavior and contributes to real and sustainable program development (Saryam, 2023; Terry, 1972)

If the commitment of the leadership organization of the educational institution is strong, then the process of character education in students will become a benchmark in other environments (Crawshaw et al., 2023; Narong, 2025). The involvement of educators, education staff, parents, and the community is urgently needed to accelerate this program. Management is held by human resources who have the appropriate qualifications and competencies (Gómez et al., 2023). The evaluation is carried out to provide periodic improvement notes as well as to improve the character of students. It is often seen that students experience religious character problems because education does not carry out the program governance process properly. This process provides a clear map of character development. Therefore, this process is stated as a fundamental process in improving the quality of educational programs.

One of the facts in MDTA Al-Irsyad Bandung shows that the governance process of the religious character education program is still not optimal. There are still students who often look brave with educators, speak impolitely, and lack mutual respect between friends. Vandalism is increasingly rampant and difficult to suppress and even eliminate. Poorly planned, implemented, and evaluated program governance that is still far from program standards creates ongoing problems that are difficult to stop. This fact encourages researchers to find solutions by looking at existing facts so that there is an improvement in the governance of the religious character education program at MDTA Al-Irsyad Bandung.

The strategy management process consists of three stages. The first is strategy formulation, the second is strategy implementation and the third is strategy evaluation (Avelar et al., 2025; Narong, 2025; Winchell & of Manufacturing Engineers, 1992). Strategy formulation includes the development of a vision and mission, identifying opportunities and external threats of the organization, discovering internal strengths and weaknesses, creating long-term goals, initiating alternative strategies and selecting specific strategies to achieve. Strategy implementation. The implementation process includes marketing development, budget preparation, development and use of information systems, and linking employee compensation to organizational performance (Juran, 2004; Tabroni et al., 2023). The challenge in implementation is to stimulate managers and employees in the organization to work with pride and enthusiasm in achieving a stated goal. It requires the formulation of annual goals, policies that motivate employees, and the allocation of resources by the company so that the formulated strategy can be carried out (Avelar et al., 2025; Internasional Education Database, 2024).

Strategy evaluation. The three fundamental activities of strategy evaluation are: 1) Reviewing the intrinsic and external factors that are the basis for the current strategy. 2) Measure the work. 3) Take corrective action. The final stage in strategic management is when a particular strategy is not working well. Internal and external factors that are the basis for the strategy are constantly changing (Lassey et al., 1971; Ledlow & Coppola, 2010). Management is interpreted by various management experts from various perspectives. Management is a typical process consisting of planning, organizing, mobilizing, and controlling actions carried out to determine and achieve the goals that have been set through the use of human resources and other resources. Management is the achievement of organizational goals effectively and efficiently through the activity of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling organizational resources (Logachev et al., 2021; Nurpita Sari, Rita Ratnasari Tabroni, n.d.)

Strategy Management can be interpreted as the art and science of the formulation, application, and evaluation of various decisions that enable the company to be able to achieve its goals (Avelar et al., 2025; Davidson & Lickona, 2006). The goal of Strategy Management is to take advantage of and create new and different opportunities for the future. Strategic management can be interpreted as a way of managing and arranging a plan to achieve goals and how to achieve these goals to bring the organization to the desired future. Strategy management can also be understood as a way to manage people and the application of how to do and then evaluate decisions on possible plans that will lead the organization to achieve its goals in the future (Mauborgne, 2005; Wakley & Chambers, 2018).

Character Formation

Madrasah is one of the strategic places in character formation other than in the family and community (Nurhadi et al., 2020; Tabroni & Mukti, 2022). That is the basis for the need for a character education program in a Madrasah, both in extracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities of the Madrasah. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate character education for each Madrasah with various activities that can support the cultivation of good character (Hasibuan, 2014). One of the activities that can be carried out as an effort to strengthen and instil character values is habituation activities carried out in Madrasah (Arif et al., 2011; Gularso & Firoini, 2015). Because indeed what is routinely done every day will be well embedded in students and other Madrasah residents.

Therefore, this habituation activity is a very important activity for the implementation of character education in Madrasah. Good habits of life in Madrasah and Madrasah culture can foster character education values. Because Madrasah culture is one of the keys to the success of character education (Arthur et al., n.d.; Kurniawan et al., 2019; Lickona, 2013b; Tabroni, Sari, et al., 2022).

Character formation can be realized through an education system. It is hoped that in the future, it can produce graduates who can build the nation without leaving noble character values. There are four character factors applied in the educational process, namely: 1) Character education based on religious values; 2) Character education based on cultural values; 3) Environment-based character education; and 4) Character education based on self-potential. The cultivation of the first character values can be started through character education based on religious values .

Character education is moral education that involves aspects of knowledge, feelings actions. Thomas Lickona—without these three aspects, character education would not be effective (Lickona, 2012, 2013a; Thomas Lickona, 1991). The process of character identification in Madrasah involves all components that must be involved in the curriculum, the learning and assessment process, the handling or management of subjects, the management of the Madrasah, the implementation of co-curricular activities and activities, the empowerment of infrastructure, financing, and the work ethic of all Madrasah residents. Character education is everything that teachers do, which is able to develop the character of students, including example, teacher behaviour, the way teachers speak and deliver material and the way teachers are tolerant. Teachers shape the character of students. Character education has the same essence and meaning as moral education and moral education which aims to shape children's personalities, so that they become good human beings, citizens and citizens (Berthelon et al., 2020).

Objectives of Character Education

Character formation is one of the goals of national education 1 of the National Education System Law in 2003 states that among the goals of national education is the development of students' potential to have intelligence, personality and noble character. The mandate of the National Education System Law in 2003 intends that Education not only forms intelligent Indonesian people but also personalities or characters so that later there will be a generation of the nation that grows and develops with a breathing character The purpose of character education related to the formation of the mentality and attitude of students is managed by instilling religious values and

positive traditional attitudes (Swandewi & De, 2020). This value must be instilled with the same intensity in all subjects in the Madrasah.

Character education requires cooperation with various parties, first working with students' parents (Rosmiati & Imam Tabroni, 2021). This is because the parents of students are partners in shaping the child's character. Parents need to plan for character formation patterns for rank. The second is the Madrasah which can improve the example for students, and the third is that the community becomes an authoritative and cleanliving environment from crime and other crimes. Improving social skills, conducting positive friendships and building *ukhuwah* or brotherhood with fellow humans and fellow Muslims (Muhammad, 2021; Thomas Lickona, 1991)

The *ukhuwah* that must be submitted is (a). *Ukhuwah bashariyah*, which is a brotherhood between human beings based on the principle of equality as human beings or *al-musawwah*; (b) *ukhuwah insaniyah*, which is a brotherhood between human beings who are ethical and understand each other from all their advantages or disadvantages; (c) *ukhuwah wathaniyah*, the brotherhood between nations or between countries, as part of the diplomacy of community and state life to uphold the values of togetherness through the principles of independence, unity of human harmony, and equality or equality. Increase the servitude of the soul to God who created man, the universe and its contents. The deepest consciousness of man is to realize how weak and helpless man is before God, unless God gives man the strength and ability to act. Increase the ability to be grateful and thank Allah for all the blessings that He has given without limits and favoritism. Improving the strategy of righteous charity is built by rational science (Rahmania & Tabroni, 2021).

B. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the strategies implemented by Madrasah heads in developing religious character among students. Given the complex nature of religious character formation, which involves multiple educational practices, the case study method is particularly well-suited for this inquiry as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the strategies, challenges, and outcomes involved in the process (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2018). The research focuses on Madrasah leaders' decision-making and actions in promoting religious values, fostering moral development, and creating a conducive environment for character education. By using a case study, the study aims to provide detailed insights into the real-world application of character development strategies in the context of Islamic education.

Data collection was carried out using a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with Madrasah heads, teachers, and key staff members who are directly involved in character education programs. The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility while ensuring that the key themes of the study were explored. Participant observation provided a direct insight into the daily practices and activities carried out at the Madrasah, particularly those designed to instill religious character among students. Additionally, documents such as Madrasah rules, program guidelines, and records of character-building activities were reviewed to complement the interview and observation data. These multiple data sources facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the character development strategies employed by the Madrasah.

Data analysis was performed using an interactive model, which includes data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the initial stage, the raw data was organized and categorized based on themes related to religious character development, such as habituation activities, extracurricular programs, and policy implementation. The subsequent reduction process involved refining the data to focus on the most relevant information related to the research objectives. Data was then displayed in a manner that allowed for easier interpretation and comparison, and conclusions were drawn regarding the effectiveness of the strategies employed by Madrasah heads. The triangulation technique was used to ensure the validity of the findings, by cross-checking data from multiple sources and methods. This approach helped to provide a robust and reliable analysis of the religious character development process at the Madrasah.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Religious Character Program Policy

The determination of educational policy formulation, implementation of educational policies, evaluation of educational policies, control of educational policies, and improvement of educational policies at MDTA Al-Irsyad Bandung through the system are stipulated in Madrasah regulations. The determination of education policy formulation is closely related to the planning process. Planning related to the formulation of education policies is very important. The determination of education policy formulation is the first step to developing a good and correct policy formulation (Bunujevac & Durisic, 2017).

The implementation of the education policy is the second step, after the establishment of the education policy formulation (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Tabroni, Jamil, et al., 2022) After the establishment and preparation of the formulation of the education policy, then the education policy is implemented. The process of implementing the formulation of the education policy must run properly and correctly in accordance with the standards that have been set by the Madrasah itself by developing the applicable standards. Education policy evaluation is the third step after the process of determining and implementing policy formulation is well implemented. Evaluation of education policy is an important part because the evaluation itself in principle contains a fairly broad meaning, namely it can have philosophical meanings such as auditing, rechecking, validation, verification and so on (Stone et al., 2023; Terry, 1977; Winkler, 2010)

Controlling education policy is a strategic step that must be taken when the evaluation of education policy formulation has been carried out. The control of educational formulation is the fifth step taken. It is necessary to control the process of education policy formulation so that the process of education policy formulation does not go out on its path and remains on its *khittah*, namely the creation of educational policies that benefit and lead to goodness and blessings. The activities carried out by the Head of Madrasah include setting a vision and mission, setting goals, formulating infrastructure facilities and human resources owned, and formulating financing and programming. According to David, the Strategy Management Process Strategy formulation includes developing a vision and mission, identifying opportunities and external threats to the organization, discovering internal strengths and weaknesses,

creating long-term goals, initiating alternative strategies and selecting specific strategies to achieve (Crawshaw et al., 2023; Crosby, 1995; Narong, 2025). Strategy implementation requires the formulation of annual goals, policies that motivate employees, and the allocation of resources by the company so that the formulated strategy can be carried out. Implementation includes marketing development, budget preparation, development and use of information systems, as well as linking employee compensation to organizational performance (Crawshaw et al., 2023).

Implementation of Development of Students' Religious Character

Implementation is the expansion of activities that adjust the interaction process between goals and actions to achieve it and requires an effective network of implementers and bureaucracy. The definition of implementation that is put forward can be said that implementation is a process of carrying out new ideas, processes or sets of activities in the hope that others can accept and make adjustments in the bureaucratic body to create a goal that can be achieved with a network of reliable implementers. Implementation is a process of implementing policies into policy actions from politics to administration. Policy development in the context of improving a program (Haryanah et al., 2024; Imam Tabroni, Ade Heni Maryani, 2022; Winkler, 2010).

Meanwhile, according to another researcher, religious character education is implemented through religious activities through a curriculum made by the Madrasah which is aimed at instructors to help them incorporate character education content into the daily routine of students through Madrasah habituation (Tabroni & Purnamasari, 2022). Through religious habituation programs that include Dhuha prayers, Dzuhur prayers, reading and writing the Qur'an, helping parents at home, and other supporting activities, Madrasah Al-Irsyad Bandung can instill values and virtues that are very important in Islam to students. This valuable process is expected to make students' lives in the classroom, at home, and in the community better (Lickona, 2013a).

Madrasah can carry out Madrasah literacy habituation activities, extracurricular activities, activities at the beginning and end of learning, habituation activities for the 5 S program (*senyum, salam, sapa, sopan, dan santun*), K3 (*Kebersihan, Keindahan, Ketertiban*), *dhuha* prayer, reading *yasin*, *muhadhoroh*, prayer and discipline enforcement. The researcher can conclude that there is a division and responsibility of duties imposed on: 1. Asatidz 2. Islamic education Teacher 3. General Teacher 4. 5th grade homeroom teacher. Extracurricular coaches, the placement of students to participate in the program well to produce the quality of students with religious characters. The authority of the Head of Madrasah is very large. As a leader, the head of the Madrasah has a big task, namely as a planner, implementer, and evaluation of the program from the beginning to the end of the scheduled program (Kesuma, 2011; Lickona, 2012).

The Head of Madrasah is responsible for planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating the program to improve the formation of religious character so that it runs under the set targets (Terry, 1977). Where in the process of achievement is quite good, this is thanks to the hard work, smart work, and sincere work of all related parties under the command of the head of the Madrasah. The obstacles faced can be overcome by making an evaluation which will later be thoroughly discussed in the evaluation in developing the formation of religious character. Analysis is a method in strategy

management in implementation in short-term and long-term fulfilment The SWOT analysis can be seen in the following table:

Table 1.1.
SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Has a student dormitory, a 2-storey mosque Have sufficient educational facilities to realize the vision, mission and goals of the Madrasah	Lack of facilities to accommodate all students Lack of Teaching Staff (HR) in teaching students
Opportunities	Threats
Getting support from the government and the community in various Madrasah programs and activities, namely the assistance of learning facilities Comfortable and quiet environment and there are dormitories owned by the Madrasah	The nearest Madrasah are imitating these activities The demand for educational qualifications for teachers and administrative staff is getting higher

Evaluation of students' religious activities

The evaluation carried out by the Head of Madrasah Al-Irsyad in Bandung supervises refraction activities, and evaluation The form of supervision in the habituation program for the formation of religious character involves the Head of the Madrasah, the Deputy Head of the Madrasah, all educators, and educators. All Madrasah personnel starting from the Head of the Madrasah to education staff have a commitment and responsibility to supervise character education activities (Thomas Lickona, 1991).

Strategy Evaluation is the final step in strategic management management knows when a particular strategy is not working well. Internal and external factors that are the basis for the strategy are constantly changing. The three fundamental activities of strategy evaluation are: (1). Reviewing the intrinsic and external factors that are the basis for the current strategy. (2). Measuring work (3). Take corrective action. The evaluation process of the religious character development program is carried out in 3 stages: Character education evaluation is carried out in the classroom by making observations on students' behaviour, both their behaviour with students and with teachers. Evaluation of character education in Madrasah. Teachers will observe how students interact with Madrasah residents, as well as provide assessments based on what aspects of character students must have (Sims, 2023; Stone et al., 2023; The John Adair, n.d.).

Evaluation of character education at home, where at-home character assessment will involve students, their parents or their guardians, older brothers, and younger siblings. Character assessment in this setting, teachers can conduct home visits to conduct observations or interviews with students' parents (Arif et al., 2011; Tabroni, Dinar, et al., 2022; Winfred F.Hill, 2012)

Honest and responsible delivery for all actions taken. Such as being able to communicate well to the people their vision, mission and programs as well as all kinds of existing regulations honestly and transparently. The Head of Madrasah in his leadership conducts an evaluation in the form of a report of every important event found and makes an accountability report with an accountable report at the end of each activity. So that there is accountable transparency that is carried out to develop the formation of students' religious character. The indicators that are formed for the achievement of religious character are faith, piety, discipline, thinking ahead, honesty, self-awareness, generosity, devotion, *tawakal*, sincerity, patience, trust, morality and civility (Deming et al., 2013; Duhan et al., 2017).

There is a process of giving demands to increase the potential of students, the demands are illustrated that the purpose of education is to assist students in the process of improving the order of their behaviour. Continuous rule enforcement from habituation that emphasizes students to process first, so that they get used to it and then all forms of rules can be implemented and obeyed. There are two ways to educate. First of all, *mujahadah* and get used to practising with charity. Second, the act is done repeatedly. In addition, it can also be pursued by asking for divine gifts.

The evaluation aims to obtain accurate information about the level of achievement of learning objectives by students so that educators can strive for follow-up. The success of achieving learning objectives can be seen in the learning outcomes of students. The learning outcomes of the students were obtained after the learning process took place. The evaluation of learning management can be seen from three components, namely learning planning, the implementation of the learning process and the evaluation of the learning outcomes carried out, it is by the evaluation model used, namely the CIPP evaluation model, which emphasizes the implementation of two main things, namely (1) quality and (2) results, and distinguishes the existence of three stages in program evaluation, namely (1) antecedents, (2) transactions, and (3) exits. The Head of Madrasah evaluates character education in the classroom by making observations, Evaluation of character education in Madrasah, and Evaluation of character education at home. Character education evaluation includes two main objectives, namely macro evaluation and micro evaluation (Griffin & Van Fleet, 2013; Monette et al., 2013; Ryckman, 2012)

As described above, researchers can conclude that the supervision of religious character formation programs carried out in Madrasah involves the Head of Madrasah, the Deputy Head of Madrasah, all educators, and educators. All Madrasah personnel starting from the Head of the Madrasah to education staff, there are three types of evaluations, namely the evaluation of character education in the classroom by making observations, the evaluation of education in the Madrasah where teachers observe students interacting with Madrasah residents, as well as character aspect assessments, evaluation of character assessments by the student's parents or guardians. Character education evaluation includes two main objectives, namely macro evaluation and micro evaluation.

D. CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth exploration of the strategies employed by Madrasah heads in shaping the religious character of students. The findings reveal that

the successful formation of religious character relies on a well-structured, multi-faceted approach that includes policy formulation, consistent program implementation, and thorough evaluation. The research highlights the importance of habituation activities, such as religious literacy programs, extracurricular activities, and daily religious practices, in fostering a culture of discipline, respect, and moral integrity among students. Additionally, the involvement of all stakeholders—Madrasah leaders, educators, students, and parents—is critical in ensuring the effectiveness of character education initiatives.

The implementation of the religious character development program in Madrasah Al-Irsyad Bandung, as analyzed in this study, demonstrates that clear policy frameworks and consistent execution can significantly enhance the quality of character education. However, challenges remain in fully engaging all students in the program, particularly due to resource constraints and varying levels of student participation. These obstacles necessitate ongoing evaluation and adaptive strategies to address emerging issues and improve the overall impact of the program.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on character education in Islamic educational institutions by providing practical insights into the strategies that can be adopted to develop students' religious character. It underscores the need for continuous improvement in program governance, resource allocation, and stakeholder collaboration. Future research should explore the long-term effects of religious character education on student behavior and academic outcomes, as well as examine how these programs can be scaled and adapted across different educational contexts. This study also opens avenues for further investigation into the role of community involvement and teacher training in enhancing the effectiveness of character education programs.

E. SUGGESTIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It still needs a commitment from Madrasah managers to replan by involving various parties to determine the policy of this program. The most visible is the inconsistency of the program which is not supported by adequate human resources. Educators tend to lack enthusiasm in the process of improving the religious character development program at MDTA. The main factor is the lack of cost support, competency improvement and adequate incentives. This factor slows down the program governance process which causes stagnation at a certain point and it is difficult to carry out a periodic and planned improvement process.

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