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PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES IN SHAPING STUDENT CHARACTER THROUGH THE HABITUATION OF 21 CHARACTER TRAITS OF TAUHID

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisis strategi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah berbasis nilai-nilai Islam dalam membentuk karakter peserta didik melalui pembiasaan 21 Karakter Tauhid di SMK Amaliah Ciawi Bogor. Masalah utama yang diangkat adalah bagaimana nilai-nilai tauhid dapat diinternalisasikan secara efektif di tengah tantangan krisis moral remaja. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah mengintegrasikan model transformasional dan spiritual. Strategi tersebut diimplementasikan melalui empat dimensi utama: kebijakan (perumusan visi dan misi berbasis tauhid), budaya sekolah religius, keteladanan (kepala sekolah sebagai *role model*), dan manajerial (koordinasi partisipatif). Pembiasaan 21 Karakter Tauhid dilaksanakan secara sistematis melalui integrasi kurikulum (mata pelajaran Akhlak Tauhid), kegiatan kesiswaan, serta rutinitas ibadah harian. Faktor pendukung utama adalah komitmen guru dan kepemimpinan yang kuat, sementara faktor penghambat berasal dari pengaruh lingkungan eksternal dan teknologi. Kesimpulannya, strategi kepemimpinan berbasis nilai Islam yang konsisten efektif dalam membentuk perilaku disiplin, religius, dan sosial peserta didik secara holistik.

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ABSTRACTS

This research aims to describe and analyze the principal's leadership strategy based on Islamic values in shaping students' character through the habituation of 21 Character of Tauhid at SMK Amaliah Ciawi Bogor. The main problem addressed is how Tauhid values can be effectively internalized amidst the challenges of adolescent moral crises. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collection techniques including interviews, observations, and documentation. The results indicate that the principal's leadership strategy integrates transformational and spiritual models. The strategy is implemented through four main dimensions: policy (formulation of Tauhid-based vision and mission), religious school culture, exemplary behavior (the principal as a role model), and managerial (participatory coordination). The habituation of 21 Character of Tauhid is carried out systematically through curriculum integration (Akhlaq Tauhid subjects), student activities, and daily worship routines. The primary supporting factors are teacher commitment and strong leadership, while inhibiting factors stem from external environmental influences and technology. In conclusion, a consistent Islamic value-based leadership strategy is effective in holistically forming students' disciplined, religious, and social behaviors.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia currently faces a serious challenge in the form of a moral crisis among students. Phenomena such as student violence, bullying, drug abuse, and ethical degradation in the digital space demonstrate that character education has not been optimally implemented. Data shows that thousands of criminal cases have involved students in recent years, reflecting the weak internalization of moral values within the education system (Febriyanti et al., 2024). This situation emphasizes the importance of systematic efforts to build student character, particularly at the vocational high school level, which is in the phase of adolescent identity development.

Character education is fundamentally a key pillar in developing a moral generation. However, its implementation is not sufficient through a formal curriculum; it requires strong leadership, role models, and consistent management of values within the school culture ('Aini et al., 2024). A persistent problem is the gap between moral knowledge and actual practice in the school environment, resulting in character values not being deeply internalized by students (Herlina & Nurlaely, 2024). Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is needed through habituation, role models, and the creation of an integrated value ecosystem.

From an Islamic educational perspective, character formation is not solely oriented toward general morality but is grounded in monotheism as the core of human personality. Monotheism-based education emphasizes the integration of intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, thereby fostering pious and noble individuals (Fauziah & Roestamy, 2020). This approach is considered more comprehensive than conventional character education models because it is rooted in transcendental values derived from the Quran and Sunnah.

The fundamental differences between national character education and monotheism-based character education can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Fundamentalism of National Character Education and Tauhid Character Education

Dimensions	National Character Education	Tawhid Character Education
Source of value	Pancasila, culture, universal morals	Al-Quran, Sunnah, transcendental values
Orientation	Discipline, ethics, citizenship	Tawhid, morals, spiritual integrity
Form	18 national character values	21 Characters of Tawhid
Method	Curriculum and habituation	Integrated habituation, exemplary behavior, integration of monotheism
Outcome	Good citizen	Humans are devout and have noble character

Source: Fauziah & Roestamy (2020)

The concept of the 21 Characters of Tawhid developed in Islamic education encompasses local, national, global, and spiritual dimensions of wisdom. Values such as siddiq (conscientiousness), amanah (trustworthiness), tabligh (protesting), fathanah (faithfulness), and istiqamah (steadfastness) are not only taught conceptually but are also built through daily practice. Therefore, Tawhid-based character education requires consistency between the values taught and actual practices in the school environment.

The successful implementation of monotheism-based character education is largely determined by the leadership role of the principal. The principal serves not only as an administrator but also as a moral and spiritual leader who shapes the school culture (Hermawansyah et al., 2025). Effective leadership is able to integrate Islamic values into policies, programs, and social interactions within the school environment. Previous research has shown that transformational leadership based on spiritual values has a significant influence on student character formation through role modeling and moral development (Barus et al., 2025).

Furthermore, habit formation strategies are key to internalizing character values. Habituation through routine activities such as worship, daily discipline, and spiritual activities has proven effective in shaping students' morality (Juliarti et al., 2025). This aligns with practices at SMK Amaliah Ciawi Bogor, which has implemented various monotheism-based programs, such as regular religious activities and integrating values into learning. Good interactions between teachers and students also contribute to building students' spiritual character (Febriyanti et al., 2024).

However, there remains a research gap regarding the specific leadership strategies of principals in implementing the 21 Characters of Tauhid in vocational high schools. Most previous studies have focused on the concept of character education or leadership in general, without examining the integration of both within the context of tauhid-based education. Therefore, this study is crucial for in-depth examination of Islamic values-based leadership strategies of principals in shaping student character through the 21 Characters of Tauhid.

This study aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategy, the implementation of tauhid character education, and the supporting and inhibiting factors in student character development. The results are expected to provide

theoretical contributions to the development of tauhid-based character education and practical contributions to educational management in Islamic schools.

B. METHOD

The contents of the study method are data collection techniques, data sources, methods of data analysis, correlation tests, and so on, written in Constantia 12 font. This chapter can also include scientific formulas for data analysis/correlation tests.

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to deeply understand the principal's leadership strategy in character formation of students through the habituation of 21 Characters of Tauhid. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore phenomena holistically and contextually according to field conditions (Sugiyono, 2020; Moleong, 2018). The study was conducted in the Even Semester of the 2024/2025 Academic Year, namely November to March 2026, at SMK Amaliah Ciawi Bogor as an Islamic-based school that implements the habituation of the character of tauhid systematically.

The research subjects consisted of key informants and primary informants selected using purposive sampling techniques, based on consideration of direct involvement in the character building program (Sugiyono, 2020). The key informant was the school principal, while the primary informants included the vice principal for curriculum, the vice principal for student affairs, and the religious coordinator.

Table 2. Research Subjects and Informants

Informant Category	Position	Role
Key Informant	Headmaster	Explaining leadership strategies and school policies
Key Informant	Vice Principal of Curriculum	Character integration in learning
	Vice Principal for Student Affairs	Implementation of student character development
	Religious Coordinator	Implementation of religious activities and habituation

Source: Processed data (2026)

The research data focused on three main aspects, namely: (1) the principal's leadership strategy based on Islamic values, (2) the implementation of the 21 Characters of Tauhid, and (3) supporting and inhibiting factors in the formation of student character.

Data collection was conducted through three techniques: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted by directly observing school activities such as religious activities, teacher-student interactions, and character building practices (Creswell, 2016). In-depth interviews were conducted with all informants to explore leadership strategies, program implementation, and their impact on student character (Moleong, 2018). Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of school archives, work programs, and evidence of character building activities.

Table 3. Data Collection Techniques

Technique	Form Activity	Data Focus
Observation	Observation directly in the environment school	Culture school , habituation character , exemplary behavior
Interview	Semi-structured interviews	Strategy leadership , program implementation , factors supporters & obstacles
Documentation	Studies document And archives school	School programs , policies , and activity character

Source: Processed data (2026)

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The data obtained were classified based on main themes and then presented in descriptive narratives and thematic tables for ease of interpretation. Conclusions were drawn gradually by verifying data consistency.

Data validity is guaranteed through triangulation techniques, namely source triangulation, technical triangulation, and member checks to ensure the validity and reliability of research data (Sugiyono, 2020; Creswell, 2016).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Results

The results of this study are presented descriptively and analytically based on field findings obtained through observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. The main focus of this study is to examine how the principal's leadership strategy in shaping students' character through the habituation of 21 Characters of Tauhid at SMK Amaliah 2 Ciawi Bogor. The findings obtained indicate that the process of character formation does not occur partially, but rather through an integrated system between leadership, school culture, and daily learning practices.

1. Principal Leadership Strategy Based on Islamic Values

The research results show that the principal implemented a leadership style that was not only oriented toward administrative management but also focused on value transformation and character development. This leadership integrated transformational and spiritual approaches, with the principal acting as both an agent of *change* and a moral figure who served as a central role model in the school environment.

The principal is actively involved in various character-building activities, both formal and informal. This demonstrates that leadership is not symbolic, but operational and contextual. The principal's ability to build collective awareness among the school community regarding the importance of the value of monotheism is a key factor in the success of the character-building program.

Theoretically, this finding is in line with the concept of transformational leadership which emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire and drive value change in the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994), as well as spiritual leadership which emphasizes the dimensions of meaning, values, and purpose in educational organizations (Fry, 2003).

The interview results show:

"The principal here not only gives direction, but really guides. He always emphasizes the importance of the value of monotheism in every school activity." (Teacher, Interview, 2026)

a. Role Model as a Primary Strategy

Role *modeling* is the most dominant strategy in leadership practice. Principals not only convey values verbally but also consistently practice them in their daily lives. Discipline, responsibility, and commitment to religious practices serve as concrete examples directly observed by students and teachers.

"He always comes early and joins in worship activities with the students." (Teacher, Interview, 2025)

These findings suggest that character formation is more effective when conducted through a *behavioral modeling approach*, where individuals learn through observation and imitation of figures who are considered authoritative and inspiring.

b. Integration of Islamic Values in Policy

The values of monotheism are not merely normative slogans, but are internalized in the school's vision, mission, and policies. The school's vision serves as a strategic direction that binds all educational activities, ensuring that every program implemented has a clear orientation toward character development based on monotheism.

"The school's vision is indeed directed at forming a monotheistic character." (Deputy Head of Curriculum, 2026)

This integration shows the harmony between normative values and institutional practices, so that there is no dichotomy between academic aspects and character formation.

c. Religious School Culture

Religious culture in schools is formed through continuous and consistent practice, both in the form of worship activities and social interactions that reflect Islamic values. This culture is not only built structurally but also through a process of internalizing values that involves the entire school community.

"The religious culture in this school was indeed built by the principal." (Teacher, 2026)

A religious school culture serves as a social environment that strengthens the character-building process, because students learn not only from instruction, but also from the atmosphere they experience every day.

d. Participatory Communication Patterns

The principal implements open, dialogic, and participatory communication patterns. Teachers and other educational staff are involved in decision-making processes, particularly those related to student character development.

"We are often invited to discuss student character development." (Teacher, 2026)

This communication pattern not only increases the sense of *belonging*, but also strengthens the collective commitment to implementing the character building program.

Table 4. Coding Strategy Leadership

Quote	Code	Category	Theme
Vision based monotheism	Mark monotheism	Policy	Strategy Leadership
Culture religious	Environment religious	Culture	Strategy Leadership
Exemplary behavior	Modeling	Behavior	Strategy Leadership
Communication active	Coordination	Managerial	Strategy Leadership

Source: Processed data (2026)

2. Implementation of the Habituation of the 21 Characters of Tawhid

The implementation of the 21 Characters of Tauhid (the 21 Characters of Tauhid) is carried out through a systemic approach integrated into all aspects of education. This approach emphasizes a process of habit *formation* that is carried out repeatedly, consistently, and sustainably, so that the values of tauhid can be deeply ingrained in students.

a. Integration in Learning

The values of monotheism are integrated into the learning process through an *embedded curriculum approach*, where character values are not taught as separate subjects but are embedded throughout the curriculum. Teachers act as facilitators, linking learning materials to Islamic values.

b. Student Activities

Student activities are designed as experiential learning media *that* enable students to internalize values through direct practice.

"All student activities are directed towards character building." (Student Affairs Deputy)

Activities such as student organizations, social activities, and leadership programs provide a means to cultivate responsibility, cooperation, and social awareness.

c. Religious Activities

Religious activities such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and Islamic studies are part of students' daily routine.

"Worship activities have become a routine for students." (Teacher, 2026)

This habituation strengthens the spiritual dimension of students and forms a sustainable religious awareness.

d. The Role of Organizational Structure

All elements of the school organization, from the principal to teachers and staff, play a role in program implementation. This demonstrates synergy and harmony in the implementation of the character-building program.

Table 2. Coding Implementation of Habituation

Quote	Code	Category	Theme
Integration curriculum	Integration	System	Implementation
Activity student	Activity	Student Affairs	Implementation
Worship routine	Habit	Religious	Implementation

Source: Processed data (2026)

3. Student Character Building

The results of the study show that the habituation of the 21 Characters of Tauhid has a significant impact on the formation of students' character, both in aspects of behavior, attitudes, and value awareness.

a. Behavioral Change

Changes in student behavior can be seen from increased discipline, responsibility, and habits in carrying out worship.

"Students are now more disciplined and accustomed to worship." (Teacher, 2026)

b. Religious and Social Attitudes

Apart from the religious aspect, there was an increase in students' social attitudes, such as concern for others, cooperation, and mutual respect.

c. Internalization of Values

The process of internalizing values is characterized by a change in student motivation from external to internal.

"Initially it was because of the rules, now it has become a habit." (Student, 2026)

This shows that the values of monotheism are not only adhered to, but have become part of students' self-awareness.

d. School Culture

The school environment develops into a *moral ecosystem* that supports sustainable character development. The norms, habits, and social interactions established in schools reinforce the internalization of values.

Table 3. Character Formation Coding

Quote	Code	Category	Theme
Discipline student	Discipline	Behavior	Character
Worship routine	Religious habits	Religious	Character
Attitude social	Morals	Social	Character

Source: Processed data (2026)

4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

a. Supporting Factors

The success of program implementation is influenced by the strength of internal factors, such as the visionary leadership of the principal, high teacher commitment, and a religious and conducive school culture.

"The support from the principal and teachers is very strong." (Teacher, 2026)

b. Inhibiting Factors

c. Inhibiting factors come from the external environment, such as social influences outside of school and the development of digital technology that can influence student behavior.

"The external environment and technology influence students." (Teacher, 2026)

Table 4. Coding Factors

Quote	Code	Category	Theme
Support head school	Leadership	Internal	Supporters
Teacher commitment	HR	Internal	Supporters
Influence outside	Environment	External	Inhibitor

Source: Processed data (2026)

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that Islamic values-based leadership strategies of school principals play a significant role in shaping student character. These findings

confirm that the success of character education depends not only on formal programs but also on the integration of leadership, organizational culture, and consistent learning practices.

1. Transformational and Spiritual Leadership

Principal leadership reflects the characteristics of transformational leadership, which is capable of building vision, inspiring change, and mobilizing all elements of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Furthermore, the spiritual dimension of leadership strengthens the value orientation and meaning within educational organizations (Fry, 2003).

The principal also acts as a *cultural leader* who shapes the school's religious culture. This aligns with the concept of character education, which emphasizes the importance of a moral environment in shaping behavior (Lickona, 1991).

Role modeling as a primary strategy also strengthens social learning theory which states that individual behavior is influenced by observation of models (Bandura).

In addition, participatory communication shows the implementation of collaborative leadership which increases teacher involvement and commitment (Muflikha & Haryanto, 2019).

2. Implementation of Habituation as an Integrated System

The implementation of habituation shows a systemic approach through the integration of curriculum, student activities, and school culture.

embedded curriculum approach has proven effective in internalizing values because it allows students to learn in real-world contexts (Herlina & Nurlaela, 2024). Meanwhile, the *experiential learning approach* provides hands-on experiences that strengthen understanding of values.

Habituation through religious activities also supports the theory of *habit formation*, where behavior that is carried out repeatedly will become a permanent habit (Ouellette & Wood, 1998).

The involvement of the entire organizational structure indicates *organizational alignment*, which is an important factor in program sustainability.

3. Character Building through Internalization of Values

Character formation in this study demonstrates a profound process of internalization of values, from rule-based compliance to intrinsic awareness. This aligns with character education theory, which encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Lickona, 1991).

The character formed is not only religious but also social, reflecting a holistic approach to education. The school environment, as a *moral ecosystem*, reinforces this process through consistent norms and culture.

4. Internal and External Factors

Successful implementation is heavily influenced by internal factors such as teacher leadership and commitment (Hidayat & Rugaiyah, 2023). However, challenges from external factors such as the social environment and digital technology demonstrate that character education cannot stand alone but requires synergy with the broader environment.

Thus, the formation of student character is the result of the interaction between the internal education system and external dynamics that continue to develop.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of the research, it can be concluded that the principal's leadership strategy in forming students' character through the habituation of 21 Tauhid Characters at SMK Amaliah 2 Ciawi Bogor shows significant effectiveness and is systemic.

First, a principal's leadership strategy based on Islamic values has been proven to build a strong foundation for character education. Principals function not only as administrators but also as transformational and spiritual leaders who integrate monotheistic values into their educational vision, policies, and practices. Role models, religious culture, and participatory communication are key instruments in creating an educational environment conducive to character formation (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Fry, 2003).

Second, the implementation of the 21 Characters of Tauhid (Monotheism) is integrated through the curriculum, student activities, religious activities, and school organizational support. This approach demonstrates that internalization of values is more effective when implemented through an embedded curriculum and experiential learning, so that the values of tauhid are not merely cognitive but become part of students' daily lives (Herlina & Nurlaely, 2024).

Third, the habituation of the 21 Characters of Tauhid has implications for the holistic development of students' character, characterized by increased discipline, religious attitudes, and social awareness. This process demonstrates a transformation from external obedience to internal awareness, which is an indicator of successful character education (Lickona, 1991).

Fourth, successful implementation is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors such as principal leadership, teacher commitment, and a religious school culture are key strengths. Meanwhile, external factors such as the social environment and technological developments pose challenges that need to be strategically addressed (Hidayat & Rugaiyah, 2023).

Implicitly, this study confirms that successful character education based on the values of monotheism requires visionary leadership, an integrated educational system, and consistent implementation. Therefore, other schools are advised to adopt a values-based leadership model and a systemic approach to implementation. Future researchers are encouraged to examine the effectiveness of this model in a broader context or use a quantitative approach to empirically measure its success.

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