



INTEGRATING RELIGIOUS VALUES INTO CHARACTER EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM AN ISLAMIC MADRASAH IN INDONESIA

MENGINTEGRASIKAN NILAI-NILAI KEAGAMAAN KE DALAM PENDIDIKAN KARAKTER: BUKTI DARI MADRASAH ISLAM DI INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara through four focal values: religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. Using a qualitative naturalistic approach, data were collected from the head of the madrasah, teachers, and students through in depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that character education is organized as a whole school culture rather than a standalone program. Religiosity is strengthened through routinized worship practices that scaffold ethical conduct and self regulation. Honesty is fostered through teacher exemplarity, trust based learning situations, and clear behavioral norms related to academic integrity and everyday responsibility. Tolerance is cultivated as a relational practice through inclusive interaction norms and respect for differences in the school community. Discipline is reinforced through consistent routines, rule clarity, and guided accountability, though its internalization remains sensitive to family support and external influences. Overall, the study shows that coherent habituation, modeling, and institutional consistency are decisive for embedding character values in students' daily behavior and for sustaining a constructive moral climate in the madrasah. The results suggest implications for school leadership, teacher development, and family engagement. Limitations include the single site design and scope, indicating the need for comparative and longitudinal studies.

Keywords : character education, madrasah, religiosity, honesty, tolerance.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi pendidikan karakter di MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara melalui empat nilai utama, yaitu religiusitas, kejujuran, toleransi, dan disiplin. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif naturalistik dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Informan penelitian meliputi kepala madrasah, guru, dan peserta didik.



Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter tidak dilaksanakan sebagai program terpisah, melainkan terintegrasi dalam budaya sekolah secara menyeluruh. Nilai religiusitas diperkuat melalui pembiasaan praktik ibadah yang terstruktur sehingga membentuk perilaku etis dan pengendalian diri peserta didik. Kejujuran ditanamkan melalui keteladanan guru, pembelajaran berbasis kepercayaan, serta penegakan norma perilaku yang jelas terkait integritas akademik dan tanggung jawab sehari-hari. Nilai toleransi dikembangkan sebagai praktik relasional melalui pola interaksi yang inklusif dan sikap saling menghormati terhadap perbedaan dalam komunitas sekolah. Disiplin diperkuat melalui rutinitas yang konsisten, kejelasan aturan, dan pembinaan tanggung jawab secara terarah, meskipun proses internalisasinya masih dipengaruhi oleh dukungan keluarga dan faktor lingkungan eksternal. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pembiasaan yang berkelanjutan, keteladanan, serta konsistensi kelembagaan merupakan faktor kunci dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai karakter dalam perilaku sehari-hari peserta didik dan dalam membangun iklim moral yang kondusif di madrasah. Temuan penelitian ini memiliki implikasi bagi kepemimpinan sekolah, pengembangan profesional guru, dan keterlibatan keluarga. Keterbatasan penelitian terletak pada desain dan cakupan lokasi yang bersifat tunggal, sehingga diperlukan penelitian lanjutan yang bersifat komparatif dan longitudinal.

Kata Kunci : pendidikan karakter, madrasah, religiusitas, kejujuran, toleransi.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia's rapidly transforming social and educational landscape, the question of how education can effectively shape students' moral and civic character has gained renewed urgency. Educators, policymakers, and scholars increasingly express concern over a perceived weakening of commitment to shared ethical and civic values, including those rooted in Pancasila. This concern is reflected in broader social symptoms such as rising intolerance, the normalization of dishonest practices, and growing indiscipline in both public and private spheres (Ali et al., 2021). These developments point to an erosion of social cohesion and civic responsibility, suggesting that intellectual advancement alone is insufficient to sustain a peaceful, respectful, and dignified society. Consequently, education is now widely expected not only to transmit knowledge and develop cognitive competence but also to cultivate the moral foundations necessary for responsible citizenship.

Within this context, character is commonly understood as an internalized constellation of values that guide individuals' thoughts, judgments, attitudes, and actions across situations. Strong character equips individuals to engage ethically with others, make responsible decisions, and resist destructive or antisocial behavior. Conversely, weakened character orientations tend to manifest in moral relativism, declining personal accountability, and fragmented social relations (Elmubarok, 2008; Mulyasa, 2013). These challenges are further intensified in the contemporary digital era. Young people today are deeply immersed in online environments that shape their language, aspirations, identities, and moral judgments, often without sufficient adult supervision or ethical scaffolding. Although digital technologies offer unprecedented educational opportunities, they simultaneously demand higher levels of moral literacy, self-regulation, and ethical discernment from learners (Hidayat & Rozak, 2021; Fauziyah & Fikroh, 2023).

Recent literature underscores that the urgency of character education has increased



alongside digital disruption. Periods of rapid technological change tend to amplify moral uncertainty and weaken traditional mechanisms of value transmission, thereby intensifying the need for deliberate character education frameworks (Fauziyah & Fikroh, 2023). Empirical studies suggest that character education can function as a mediating force that bridges the ethical gaps created by digital influences, helping students develop ethical awareness and responsible online and offline behavior (Haryanti et al., 2022; Babys & Pramana, 2025). In multicultural societies, these challenges are compounded by cultural diversity and differing interpretations of moral values, which may lead to misalignment in character expectations and practices (Hidayati et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, schools are increasingly conceptualized not merely as sites of academic instruction but as moral communities in which values are cultivated through everyday practices, social interactions, and shared norms. Character education, therefore, cannot be reduced to isolated programs or ceremonial activities; rather, it constitutes a long-term institutional commitment embedded within school culture. Research consistently emphasizes that effective character education requires systematic integration into curricula and extracurricular activities, supported by consistent discipline, teacher role modeling, and collaboration with families and communities (Sarkadi et al., 2022). Such integrative approaches foster not only cognitive development but also social and emotional competencies that underpin ethical behavior.

Indonesia's national education policy provides a strong normative foundation for this integrative vision of character education. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System explicitly identifies moral and character development as core educational objectives, aiming to nurture learners who are faithful, pious, noble in character, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible citizens (Republik Indonesia, 2003). This commitment is further reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, which mandates that character formation be embedded within academic learning, school culture, and collaborative community practices (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2017). These policy frameworks affirm that character education is not a peripheral concern but a central component of national educational development.

The imperative of character education carries particular significance for Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs. Madrasahs are tasked with fulfilling national educational standards while simultaneously nurturing ethical and spiritual qualities grounded in Islamic teachings. Within Islamic educational philosophy, moral conduct (**akhlak**) is not merely a social virtue but an expression of faith itself. Islamic teachings emphasize virtues such as honesty, self-discipline, compassion, and tolerance as daily obligations that must be embodied in personal conduct and communal life (Departemen Agama RI, 2020; Shihab, 2002). The concept of **tarbiyah** further underscores a holistic educational approach that nurtures learners intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, extending beyond narrow academic achievement (Olmeda & Pérez, 2024; Umam et al., 2025).

Contemporary Islamic education literature highlights that **akhlak**, **tarbiyah**, and



moral formation are deeply interconnected. Akhlak is articulated as a comprehensive ethical framework derived from Islamic teachings, emphasizing the cultivation of virtuous character and moral responsibility (Asildo et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2024). This framework promotes responsible citizenship not only within religious communities but also within broader social contexts (Romzi et al., 2024). While Western character education theories often emphasize democratic virtues, critical thinking, and moral reasoning, Islamic moral education places stronger emphasis on divine guidance and theological foundations (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Romzi et al., 2024). Despite these differences, both traditions converge in their shared aim of fostering ethical decision-making, social cohesion, and community well-being (Dharin, 2025; Mahfud, 2025).

Within this theoretical convergence, the madrasah is widely conceptualized as a moral or ethical community. Beyond serving as a venue for academic learning, the madrasah functions as a communal environment in which ethical values are modeled, practiced, and reinforced through daily interactions among teachers, students, and staff (Habibullah et al., 2022; Maisyanah & Kurniawan, 2023). This communal dimension strengthens shared responsibility for moral guidance and character development, reinforcing ethical standards and social cohesion (Mu'min et al., 2025; Asman et al., 2024; Mulang & Putra, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2023). Nevertheless, translating normative frameworks and philosophical ideals into effective lived practice remains a persistent challenge. Research on moral and character education emphasizes that values become meaningful and internalized only when they are embedded in real-life contexts, experienced repeatedly through structured routines, and reinforced by credible adult role models (Zuriah, 2007). Structured planning and habitual reinforcement are therefore essential to ensure that moral messages are not merely aspirational but are embedded within school culture (Aunillah, 2011). Lickona's influential framework further argues that character education must address three interconnected dimensions—moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—and that internalization occurs when students encounter values consistently across classrooms, religious activities, extracurricular programs, and informal interactions (Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013).

From a conceptual standpoint, character is understood as a relatively stable set of psychological and moral dispositions that guide behavior across time and contexts. Etymologically, the term implies something engraved or imprinted, highlighting the enduring and observable nature of character traits manifested through consistent conduct (Elmubarak, 2008). Scholars such as Mulyasa (2013) describe character as an integration of moral, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, visible in everyday actions such as responsibility, honesty, respect, and self-discipline. Character, in this sense, represents a form of moral identity that is expressed through social interaction rather than merely individual preference. In the madrasah context, four character values are particularly salient and operationally relevant: religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. Religiosity extends beyond ritual observance to encompass ethical sensitivity, spiritual accountability, and the motivation to do good as an act of worship (Shihab, 2002; Putra, 2022). Honesty is conceptualized as a moral



obligation that underpins trust and credibility in both educational and religious settings (Madani, 2021). Tolerance is framed as active respect for diversity, an essential virtue in pluralistic societies where differences in belief, culture, and ideology must be navigated with empathy and dignity (Tamaeka, 2022). Discipline, meanwhile, is understood as both an external structure and an internal form of self-regulation that supports academic success, social order, and personal integrity (Lickona, 1991; Elmubarak, 2008).

Existing research also highlights the importance of institutional climate and local cultural context in shaping character education outcomes. Studies from North Halmahera indicate that local religious and social dynamics significantly influence students' moral behavior and community engagement (Bakence, 2021). More broadly, character education research has identified substantial gaps in attention to specific geographical regions, school types, and cultural settings, particularly in parts of Southeast Asia (Sirait, 2023; Maulana et al., 2024). Madrasahs in Eastern Indonesia remain underexplored, with limited empirical studies examining how character education is implemented and experienced in these contexts (Sidek et al., 2023; Rosanti et al., 2024). Moreover, the processes and actors involved in value internalization—especially students and local communities—are often insufficiently analyzed (Jufri & Das, 2024; Siregar & Hasibuan, 2024; Liu, 2023).

Responding to these gaps, the present study investigates the implementation of character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara, located in Dokulamo Village, West Galela District, North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province (MTsN Halmahera Utara, 2023). Employing a qualitative naturalistic approach (Sugiyono, 2013), the study examines how the four core values—religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline—are embedded in the daily life of the madrasah. It explores the practices, interactions, and institutional conditions that support or hinder value internalization, as well as their implications for student behavior and the moral climate of the school.

By situating its analysis at the intersection of national policy, Islamic moral philosophy, and local socio-cultural context, this study seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of character education. Theoretically, it clarifies how moral values are operationalized within a religious school setting under dual normative influences. Practically, it offers insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to cultivate moral integrity, respectful social relations, and disciplined learning in the midst of ongoing social and technological change. Ultimately, this study affirms that effective character education must be holistic, context-sensitive, and firmly grounded in everyday school culture.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a naturalistic orientation to understand the implementation of character education in its real school context (Nugraha, 2025). The research was conducted at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara, located in Dokulamo, West Galela District, North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province. The qualitative approach was selected because the phenomenon under study involves values, daily practices, and



meaning making processes that are best captured through in depth exploration of participants' experiences and institutional routines.

The primary data sources consisted of key school actors, including the head of the madrasah, teachers, and students. Secondary data were obtained from relevant documents that supported the description and verification of character education practices, such as school regulations, activity schedules, and other institutional records. Data were collected using three main techniques. First, in depth interviews were conducted to elicit participants' perspectives on how character values were promoted, supported, or challenged in the madrasah. Second, participant observation was used to document routine activities, classroom interactions, and school culture related to the values of religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. Third, documentation was used to triangulate findings and strengthen interpretive accuracy.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw field data to identify patterns relevant to the research focus. Data display was conducted through organized narratives and thematic matrices to support systematic interpretation. Conclusions were drawn iteratively, continually checked against field evidence to ensure credibility.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation of sources and methods. These strategies helped confirm consistency across interviews, observations, and documents and reduced the risk of biased interpretation.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Overview of implementation patterns

Field evidence from interviews, observations, and documentation indicates that character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara is implemented as an integrated school wide agenda rather than as a stand alone program. The implementation is embedded in classroom learning practices, routine religious activities, school rules, and daily interaction norms. In line with character education theory, this integration reflects the principle that values are more likely to be internalized when they are repeatedly practiced through habituation and supported by role modeling, not only communicated as moral messages (Aunillah, 2011; Asmani, 2012; Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013).

Across data sources, participants consistently described four focal values as the operational core of the program, namely religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. These values were not treated as abstract concepts; they were translated into visible routines and expectations that shaped the moral climate of the madrasah, reinforcing the idea that character becomes "engraved" through consistent practice and observable behavior (Elmubarok, 2008; Mulyasa, 2013).



b. Religiosity in daily routines and learning integration

Religiosity emerged as the most institutionally structured value, strengthened through daily worship routines and classroom openings that emphasize prayer and remembrance. Teachers and school leaders described religiosity as being cultivated through regular practice that precedes and accompanies learning. One teacher stated:

“Sebelumnya pembelajaran dimulai siswa terlebih dahulu melaksanakan sholat dhuha dan setelah masuk ke kelas sebelum materi dimulai siswa terlebih dahulu membaca doa.” (Lasmi Labada, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Another teacher reinforced the routine nature of worship habituation as the core vehicle for religious character formation:

“Berdoa sebelum dan sesudah pelajaran, Asmaul Husna, dan shalat berjama'ah.” (Abdillah Abbas, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Religiosity was also presented as being integrated into lesson content through contextual connections between subject matter and religious meaning. A teacher described how religious values were woven into instruction and accompanied by daily charitable practice:

“Memberikan salam dan mengawali pelajaran dengan doa bersama, mengintegrasikan nilai nilai agama dalam materi pelajaran, misalnya saat pelajaran IPA kita bahas tentang keajaiban pencipta alam semesta, serta mengadakan proyek sedekah harian... kami juga membiasakan sholat dhuha berjamaah dan menghafal ayat ayat Al Quran atau doa doa pendek sebelum pelajaran dimulai.” (Rahmad Musa, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

These findings suggest that religiosity functions as both a ritual routine and a pedagogical orientation. This aligns with the view that Islamic education seeks holistic development, combining moral formation and spiritual accountability with learning (Departemen Agama RI, 2020; Putra, 2022; Shihab, 2002). In practice, religiosity became a foundation for other values by shaping an environment of reverence, self control, and ethically oriented school culture.

c. Honesty as habituation, trust, and social practice

Honesty was repeatedly described as a core moral foundation cultivated through habituation, role modeling, and the assignment of responsibility. School leadership emphasized that honesty was intentionally installed as a daily habit rather than a purely verbal message:

“pembiasaan berkata jujur dalam kondisi apapun menjadi hal utama yang kami tanamkan kepada seluruh peserta didik.” (Salwa Tihuraa, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

From the teacher perspective, honesty education was framed as inseparable from exemplarity. A teacher highlighted the expectation that educators must model honesty consistently:

“guru juga harus memberikan contoh sikap jujur dalam perkataan dan perbuatan sehari hari di kelas.” (Lasmi Labada, personal communication, October 16, 2025)



Another teacher described an instructional strategy based on trust and educative consequences, suggesting that honesty is nurtured when students are trusted and guided to acknowledge wrongdoing responsibly:

“penuh kepada siswa saat ulangan tanpa pengawasan ketat, serta membiasakan mereka untuk mengakui kesalahan dengan konsekuensi yang mendidik.” (Rahmad Musa, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Teachers also offered concrete practices that translate honesty into behavior, such as independent task completion and discouraging cheating:

“Dengan mendorong siswa untuk mengerjakan tugas secara mandiri, mengembalikan barang yang dipinjam, dan tidak mencontek saat ujian.” (Abdillah Abbas, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

The importance of teacher exemplarity and moral explanation was reinforced by another teacher:

“Guru harus menjadi teladan dan menjelaskan konsekuensi dari ketidakjujuran kepada peserta didik.” (Nursakia Masud, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Similarly, a teacher described the value of appreciation and a supportive learning environment for honesty:

“Guru selalu menjadi teladan, memberikan apresiasi untuk kejujuran, serta menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang menumbuhkan nilai kejujuran.” (Darmawati Nurdin, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Honesty was also enacted in everyday social life. One teacher explained the expectation of returning lost items and admitting mistakes:

“Jika peserta didik menemukan barang milik teman, maka harus dikembalikan, dan setiap ada masalah peserta didik diharapkan jujur mengakuinya.” (Taefa U. Hi Hanan, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Student statements confirm that the honesty message was received as a clear behavioral norm:

“kami diajarkan supaya jujur dan tidak berbohong.” (M. Abu Yazid Laida, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

“kami jujur kepada guru dan tidak boleh mengambil barang orang lain.” (Narsya Andini Hakim, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

“Kalau ambil barang teman harus jujur.” (Siti Nur Aisa Doya, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Overall, the findings show that honesty was constructed through a combined mechanism of habituation, modeling, trust building, and consistent rule reinforcement. This resonates with character education perspectives that emphasize moral action and school culture coherence, where values become part of students' character through repeated practice and consistent moral climate (Asmani, 2012; Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013; Zuriah, 2007).



d. Tolerance as inclusive relations across difference

Tolerance emerged as a strong social value that shaped relationships among students and between students and teachers, including respect for those who hold different beliefs. The head of the madrasah described tolerance outcomes in explicit terms:

“Dampak yang dirasakan dari penerapan nilai toleransi adalah peserta didik mampu menghormati dan menghargai guru yang tidak seaqidah”. (Salwa Tihuraa, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Teachers also reported observable changes in students’ friendship patterns and social openness:

“Siswa sudah bisa bertoleransi dalam berteman tanpa melihat perbedaan”. (Lasmi Labada, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

“Peserta didik memiliki sikap toleransi kepada orang lain yang berbeda keyakinan”. (Grace S. Baud, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

These quotations support the interpretation that tolerance was not limited to a slogan but developed as a daily relational practice. In the literature, tolerance is understood as active respect, supportive attitudes, and behavior toward those who differ in conviction or perspective (Tamaeka, 2022). The findings align with that definition by showing tolerance in peer relations and in student respect toward educators of different beliefs. In addition, the school’s tolerance outcomes can be read as evidence that value internalization becomes stronger when reinforced through repeated interaction norms, guided dialogue, and inclusive modeling, consistent with character education principles that move beyond moral knowing toward moral practice (Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013).

e. Discipline as punctuality, compliance, and self regulation

Discipline was repeatedly described as both a rule based expectation and a growing self regulated habit. School leadership reported clear behavioral change, particularly in punctuality and responsibility:

“Peserta didik sekarang datang tepat waktu, dan yang terlambat melaksanakan sholat dhuha tanpa disuruh.” (Salwa Tihuraa, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

This quotation indicates that discipline was observed not only in arriving on time, but also in taking initiative to fulfill religious obligations without being prompted. A teacher confirmed that discipline was becoming internalized as awareness:

“Peserta didik memiliki kesadaran tinggi untuk disiplin.” (Grace S. Baud, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Discipline was also visible through compliance with dress rules and school order:

“Anak anak sudah berpakaian sesuai dengan aturan yang ditetapkan.” (Lasmi Labada, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Alongside these positive results, the study also captured obstacles and enforcement challenges. Teachers noted that discipline requires consistent reinforcement because some students still lack awareness of rules:



“Masih banyak siswa yang kurang sadar aturan, jadi kami harus terus menegakkan disiplin dalam tata tertib sekolah”. (Grace S. Baud, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

A related enforcement strategy was described in terms of sanctions to prevent repetition of violations:

“Kalau anak-anak melanggar aturan sekolah, perlu ditegaskan lagi sanksinya supaya mereka tidak mengulangi”. (Lasmi Labada, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

Another teacher pointed to family and environmental influence as barriers to disciplinary internalization:

“Kurangnya perhatian orang tua dan pengaruh lingkungan membuat siswa sulit menanamkan disiplin”. (Abdillah Abbas, personal communication, October 16, 2025)

These findings suggest that discipline formation depended on both institutional structure and external reinforcement. The pattern fits character education arguments that discipline and other virtues are strengthened when school rules, modeling, and family support align, and weakened when there is inconsistency across environments (Asmani, 2012; Aunillah, 2011; Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013).

f. Supporting and inhibiting factors across values

Across the four values, participants described several supporting factors that made implementation workable. First, consistent worship routines and religious school culture provided a stable environment for habituation, supporting the Islamic education orientation of moral formation through practice (Departemen Agama RI, 2020; Shihab, 2002). Second, teacher role modeling functioned as a critical credibility mechanism, especially for honesty and discipline. Third, structured school rules and consistent routines provided clarity of expectations and opportunities for reinforcement. Fourth, a socially harmonious environment supported tolerance practice through daily interaction.

At the same time, inhibiting factors were also reported and can be grouped into internal student factors, family factors, and institutional consistency factors. Internal factors included low motivation and inconsistent self control among some students, which made regular participation in routines uneven. Family factors included limited parental attention and environmental influence that conflict with school norms, particularly affecting discipline. Institutional consistency issues included the practical challenge of continuously enforcing rules and ensuring consistent teacher voice in discipline and moral guidance. These findings reflect the broader argument in moral education literature that character education requires coherence among school, family, and community, and that values are more readily internalized when consistently reinforced across settings (Zuriah, 2007; Asmani, 2012).

In summary, the results show that MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara implemented character education through integrated routines and school culture mechanisms focused on religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. Religiosity was built through prayer, congregational worship, Quran related habituation, and religious integration into lessons. Honesty was cultivated through habituation, teacher exemplarity, trust based practices, and concrete social



norms such as returning belongings and admitting mistakes. Tolerance was evidenced in respectful relationships across difference and inclusive friendship patterns. Discipline was observed in punctuality, compliance with rules, initiative in worship duties, and growing self awareness, although enforcement challenges remained.

Taken together, the findings support the view that character education becomes effective when it is contextual, routine based, and modeled consistently, enabling values to move from moral knowledge toward moral habit and moral action (Elmubarak, 2008; Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013; Mulyasa, 2013; Tamaeka, 2022).

g. Discussion

This study contributes to the growing body of character education scholarship by demonstrating that character education in a madrasah context is most effectively operationalized as a school-culture-based process rather than as a compartmentalized or programmatic intervention. Across all findings, the most salient pattern is the central role of school culture mechanisms—particularly habituation and adult exemplarity—in shaping the internalization of values. This reinforces the theoretical position that character is not merely a form of moral knowledge, but a relatively stable disposition that becomes visible through consistent behavior over time (Elmubarak, 2008; Mulyasa, 2013). In line with Lickona's framework, the findings suggest that moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action are continuously reinforced when values are embedded in daily routines, institutional norms, and interpersonal relationships within the school environment (Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013). In this sense, institutional design and everyday practices function as a form of moral infrastructure that renders values observable, learnable, and socially reinforced.

A key interpretive insight concerns the foundational role of religiosity in structuring the moral ecology of the madrasah. The findings indicate that religiosity does not operate solely as ritual observance but serves as an integrative normative framework that supports the cultivation of other character values. This aligns with Islamic education literature that conceptualizes religiosity as a multidimensional process encompassing *tarbiyah* (holistic education), *ta'leem* (instruction), and *ta'deeb* (moral formation) (Lafrarchi, 2020). Empirical studies further demonstrate that structured religious education contributes to moral reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility, thereby supporting holistic student development (Irfan & Sain, 2024; Susanti et al., 2023). The present findings are also consistent with Islamic philosophical perspectives that position moral conduct as an expression of faith and spiritual accountability (Departemen Agama RI, 2020; Shihab, 2002; Putra, 2022).

At the same time, the findings reveal that religious routines alone do not guarantee uniform internalization across students. This nuance reinforces the ecological perspective emphasized in prior research, which argues that values are more likely to become enduring dispositions when school-based practices are complemented by reinforcement from families and the wider community (Aunillah, 2011; Zuriyah, 2007). This insight supports recent studies emphasizing that religiosity is most effectively internalized when moral values are integrated across curricular, extracurricular, and cultural dimensions of schooling (Ningsih et al., 2024;



Rachmadtullah et al., 2024). Thus, religiosity functions not merely as content but as a structuring force that shapes self-regulation and moral commitment within a supportive institutional climate.

The findings related to honesty further strengthen theoretical arguments regarding the importance of coherent moral environments in fostering ethical integrity. The madrasah's emphasis on responsibility, trust, and teacher modeling resonates with literature identifying institutional culture and adult exemplarity as critical factors in promoting academic honesty (Asmani, 2012; Aunillah, 2011). Prior research demonstrates that ethical education grounded in religious or moral instruction correlates positively with academic integrity and personal accountability (Halim et al., 2023; Asildo et al., 2022; Ridwan & Diantimala, 2021). Additionally, psychological empowerment and supportive educational environments have been shown to influence students' ethical decision-making (Begum et al., 2021).

Consistent with Lickona's argument, the present study suggests that honesty formation extends beyond prohibiting misconduct such as cheating; rather, it involves designing moral learning environments that encourage students to act with integrity even when dishonesty is possible (Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013). However, the persistence of challenges related to family influence and broader social pressures underscores the literature's assertion that character education is vulnerable when moral messages across environments are inconsistent (Zuriah, 2007; Rusdi et al., 2023). This finding reinforces the importance of coherence between school norms, family practices, and peer cultures in sustaining honesty as a stable moral disposition.

Tolerance emerges in this study as a relational and community-based dimension of character education, highlighting that moral values are internalized through lived interaction rather than verbal instruction alone. The enactment of tolerance in everyday relationships supports conceptualizations of tolerance as active respect and supportive engagement with difference (Tamaeka, 2022). Prior research distinguishes between homogeneous and heterogeneous school contexts, noting that tolerance in relatively homogeneous environments is often reinforced through shared norms, whereas heterogeneous settings require structured dialogue and inclusive pedagogical strategies (Astra et al., 2024; Syihabudin et al., 2023; Azme, 2024). The findings of this study suggest that even within relatively cohesive cultural settings, tolerance must be continuously cultivated through modeled behavior and repeated social practice.

This interpretation aligns with Lickona's framework, in which tolerance can be understood as moral action shaped by norms of respect, inclusion, and conflict management (Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013). Moreover, the context-sensitive nature of tolerance development in this study resonates with scholarship emphasizing that local sociocultural dynamics significantly influence how differences are perceived and negotiated in educational settings (Bakence, 2021; Faizah et al., 2023). Thus, tolerance in this madrasah can be interpreted as the product of both institutional cultivation and contextual necessity.

The findings on discipline provide a theoretically meaningful distinction between discipline as external compliance and discipline as internal self-regulation. The study indicates



that discipline becomes more robust when routines are consistent and when students begin to demonstrate initiative, reflecting the idea that character is formed through repetition until behavior becomes habitual (Elmubarok, 2008; Mulyasa, 2013). This interpretation aligns with literature distinguishing self-regulation—rooted in intrinsic motivation and moral awareness—from institutional control, which relies primarily on external enforcement (Mufid et al., 2024; Arfan et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025).

Religious educational contexts, including madrasahs, are often found to emphasize self-regulation grounded in faith and moral responsibility, thereby fostering deeper internalization of discipline (Syarnubi et al., 2021; Hidayat & Janan, 2023). In contrast, secular settings tend to prioritize compliance through rules and sanctions (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Badrudin, 2022). The present findings support this distinction, while also confirming that discipline remains fragile when family involvement is limited or when media and peer influences contradict school expectations (Zuriah, 2007; Juma'ah et al., 2023; Hazyimara et al., 2024). This underscores the need for character education strategies that strengthen intrinsic motivation, self-awareness, and family–school partnerships (Desfitri et al., 2024; Wardhani, 2023).

Comparatively, the findings align with prior studies emphasizing that character education in madrasahs is often rooted in religious ethical models that resonate with students' identities and cultural contexts (Taja et al., 2021; Samal et al., 2023). This contrasts with character education in public schools, which tends to emphasize universal traits without deep cultural or spiritual integration (Hariyanto et al., 2022). Cross-cultural studies further suggest that while values such as honesty and responsibility are universally emphasized, their internalization is shaped by local cultural and religious nuances (Hidayat & Janan, 2023; Syarnubi et al., 2021; Pribadi et al., 2024).

Taken together, the discussion supports a school-culture-based model of character education that emphasizes integration, coherence, and contextual sensitivity. This perspective is consistent with theoretical arguments that character internalization depends on collaborative and participatory approaches involving teachers, students, families, and communities (Romano et al., 2021; Baş, 2024). The literature further highlights the pivotal roles of teachers as moral exemplars (Lei et al., 2022), school leaders in shaping ethical climates (Burbidge & Hamer, 2020), and supportive institutional environments in sustaining character education initiatives (Gao et al., 2024).

In summary, this study's findings demonstrate that character education effectiveness in this madrasah is best explained by a culture-centered model of internalization. Habituation and adult exemplarity operationalize character as an embodied disposition, consistent with conceptualizations of character as stable and observable through action (Elmubarok, 2008; Mulyasa, 2013) and with theoretical frameworks emphasizing repeated moral practice within coherent school climates (Lickona, 1991, 2012, 2013). By highlighting the interconnected cultivation of religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline within a specific Islamic and local context, the study reinforces the view that character education must be holistic, context-



sensitive, and grounded in everyday school culture (Departemen Agama RI, 2020; Putra, 2022; Shihab, 2002; Tamaeka, 2022; Bakence, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara is most effectively understood as a school culture practice in which religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline are internalized through consistent routines, classroom integration, and adult exemplarity. Rather than functioning as a separate instructional component, character education operates as a daily institutional ecology that provides repeated opportunities for students to encounter values and practice them in authentic social situations. The value of this analysis lies in demonstrating how a madrasah can translate character ideals into observable habits and relational norms, and in clarifying that the most decisive mechanism is not a single activity, but the coherence between habituation, modeling, and school expectations.

At the same time, the study indicates that internalization is uneven and highly dependent on contextual reinforcement. Character formation is strengthened when school norms are coherent and supported by families and the surrounding environment, but it is constrained when student motivation is low or when external influences contradict school expectations. This highlights that character education outcomes cannot be fully attributed to school programs alone, because they are shaped by the interaction between school culture and students' broader social ecology.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is based on a single madrasah, so the findings are context specific and cannot be generalized directly to all Islamic schools or regions. Second, the qualitative design prioritizes depth of understanding and does not quantify the magnitude of change in each character domain. Third, the study captures conditions at a particular period and therefore does not fully explain how character development evolves over time or how durable the outcomes are after students leave the school setting.

Future research should extend this work through comparative studies across multiple madrasahs in different sociocultural contexts to identify which implementation mechanisms are transferable and which are locally contingent. Longitudinal designs are also needed to examine the sustainability of character outcomes across school years and beyond schooling. In addition, mixed methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with validated measurement instruments would strengthen evidence about effectiveness and clarify relationships among religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. These directions will support the development of more context responsive and evidence informed character education models in Islamic schooling.

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