Research Article

Embedding Character Education through School Culture in Islamic Junior High Schools: A Qualitative Study of Religiosity, Honesty, Tolerance, and Discipline

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Abstract: This study investigates how character education is embedded into the school culture of an Indonesian Islamic junior high school (madrasah), focusing on four core values: religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. Using a qualitative naturalistic approach, the research was conducted at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, and students. The findings reveal that character education at the madrasah is not a standalone program but is institutionalized through consistent routines, religious practices, and role modeling. Religiosity is fostered through structured worship, integration of Islamic values into lessons, and spiritual habits. Honesty is promoted via trust-based learning environments, teacher exemplarity, and reinforcement of moral norms. Tolerance is cultivated through inclusive social interactions and respect for religious and cultural differences, while discipline is internalized through habitual rule-following, punctuality, and self-regulation. These findings align with existing theories and regional character education frameworks, confirming that character is best formed through embedded cultural processes and consistent adult exemplarity. The study contributes to the understanding of how Islamic schools can function as moral communities and highlights the importance of alignment between school culture, family support, and wider social contexts in achieving sustainable moral development.

Keywords: Character Education; Honesty; Islamic School Culture; Religiosity; Tolerance.

1. Introduction

Character education has re-emerged as a central concern in Indonesian education amid rapid social change and the acceleration of digital life. Schools are increasingly confronted with the challenge of forming students who are not only cognitively competent but also morally grounded and socially responsible. In the digital era, students' moral development is shaped not only by formal schooling but also by constant exposure to online information, social media, and digital communication spaces that often lack ethical guidance. Recent studies indicate that many Indonesian schools struggle to integrate character education meaningfully within digital literacy initiatives, resulting in a gap between technological competence and moral maturity (Dewi et al., 2023; Utaminingsih et al., 2023). The spread of misinformation, hoaxes, and polarizing content further exacerbates this condition, weakening ethical judgment and undermining the values required for social cohesion (Nanda & Budimansyah, 2020; Pentianasari et al., 2022). These dynamics underscore that character education is no longer a peripheral concern but a fundamental requirement for sustaining social integrity in contemporary Indonesia.

The urgency of character education is also closely linked to broader concerns about the weakening of Pancasila values among Indonesian youth. Pancasila, as the philosophical foundation of the nation, provides moral and civic principles intended to guide individual behavior and collective life. However, empirical evidence suggests that attachment to these

values has diminished, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly influenced by global digital cultures and fragmented information flows (Dewi et al., 2023; Hidayatulloh et al., 2024). As these foundational values erode, young people become more susceptible to divisive ideologies, intolerance, and moral relativism, which threaten social cohesion and national unity (Sugiarto & Farid, 2023; Utaminingsih et al., 2023)utam. Within this context, education is expected to function as a strategic arena for re-strengthening moral commitments, fostering civic responsibility, and nurturing ethical dispositions that support peaceful coexistence in a plural society.

Despite strong normative expectations, the practical implementation of character education remains problematic. One of the main research problems lies in the persistent gap between policy mandates and everyday educational practice. While character education is formally endorsed in curricula and policy documents, it is often reduced to symbolic activities, slogans, or isolated lessons that fail to influence students' daily behavior. Many schools lack coherent strategies to translate abstract moral values into lived practices that are consistently reinforced across learning, discipline systems, and social interaction. This problem is intensified in the digital era, where external influences from social media and peer networks frequently contradict school messages, making moral internalization fragile and uneven (Dewi et al., 2023; Nanda & Budimansyah, 2020).

A related problem concerns moral disorientation in increasingly multicultural and diverse social environments. Students today navigate complex social spaces characterized by differences in religion, culture, and worldview, both offline and online. Without adequate guidance, this diversity can generate confusion in moral reasoning and lead to behaviors perceived as intolerant, disrespectful, or socially insensitive (Efendi & Lien, 2021; Winata, 2020). Research shows that a lack of exposure to multicultural values and inclusive educational frameworks contributes to tensions and weakens students' capacity for empathy and mutual respect (Jamaluddin et al., 2023; Umar & Tumiwa, 2020). Consequently, character education must address not only individual morality but also relational ethics, equipping students with the capacity to live ethically within diverse communities.

In response to these challenges, the literature proposes several general solutions centered on strengthening the integration of character education into the core life of schools. Scholars emphasize that character education should not be treated as an add-on program but as an integral dimension of educational quality, embedded in school culture, pedagogy, and leadership practices. A value-based educational environment that consistently models ethical conduct, respect, and responsibility is more likely to foster moral internalization than fragmented or episodic interventions (Fitriansyah, 2020; Hartinah, Badarab, et al., 2023). This approach aligns with the view that moral development requires coherence between what schools proclaim and what they practice on a daily basis.

Within this broader discourse, Islamic schools (madrasahs) occupy a particularly strategic position. Madrasahs are entrusted with a dual mission: achieving national educational goals while also nurturing moral and spiritual values grounded in Islamic teachings. The literature highlights that madrasahs have significant potential to integrate religious instruction with character education, shaping students' moral behavior through both curricular and cultural mechanisms (Habiba et al., 2024; Hidayatulloh et al., 2024). By grounding character education in religious values, madrasahs can offer a moral framework that emphasizes integrity, responsibility, and accountability as part of faith. Moreover, Islamic educational institutions are increasingly encouraged to adapt their curricula to contemporary challenges, including digital transformation, without losing their ethical and spiritual orientation (Fadli & Dwiningrum, 2021; Kambali et al., 2023).

More specific solutions identified in the literature point to the importance of operationalizing character values through concrete practices such as habituation, role modeling, and consistent routines. Studies suggest that values such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline are most effectively internalized when they are repeatedly practiced in authentic contexts and reinforced by credible adult behavior (Hartinah, Riantika, et al., 2023; Nur et al., 2025). For example, religiosity can function as a moral foundation when religious practices are integrated into daily school routines, shaping self-regulation and ethical awareness. Honesty is strengthened when trust-based learning environments and clear norms of integrity are consistently upheld. Tolerance develops through inclusive interaction norms and guided engagement with diversity, while discipline emerges from coherent rules and supportive accountability mechanisms.

National education policies in Indonesia provide a strong institutional basis for these approaches. The Pancasila Student Profile, formalized in Ministerial Regulation No. 22 of

2020, explicitly positions character development as a core outcome of education, encouraging schools to cultivate values aligned with national ideology and cultural diversity (Herlina et al., 2024; Rohimah, 2023). In parallel, the National Character Education Movement promotes comprehensive strategies that integrate moral education across learning, school culture, and community engagement, particularly in response to Indonesia's multicultural context (Faizah et al., 2023; Herlina et al., 2024). These policy frameworks affirm that character education is a systemic responsibility requiring coordinated action at institutional and cultural levels.

Nevertheless, a review of existing studies reveals a notable research gap. While many scholars acknowledge the importance of school culture and religious values in character education, there remains limited empirical research that examines in depth how specific character values are embedded and practiced as part of everyday school culture in madrasah contexts, particularly in diverse and peripheral regions of Indonesia. Much of the literature focuses either on normative frameworks or on isolated programs, leaving insufficient understanding of how values are operationalized, sustained, and experienced by school actors in their daily routines. Furthermore, few studies simultaneously explore religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline as interconnected values within a single institutional ecology, despite their conceptual interdependence in moral formation.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine how character education is implemented as an integrated school culture in an Indonesian madrasah, with a specific focus on the values of religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. The study seeks to analyze how these values are embedded in daily practices, supported or constrained by institutional and social factors, and reflected in students' behavior. The novelty of this study lies in its holistic, culture-centered perspective, which moves beyond programmatic descriptions to explore character education as a lived and relational process. By focusing on a concrete madrasah context, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how faith-based educational institutions can respond to contemporary moral challenges, bridging policy ideals, religious principles, and everyday educational practice.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Conceptualizing Character in Education and Moral Development
The concept of "character" in education encompasses a constellation of moral, emotional, and social attributes that guide individual behavior, influence ethical decision-making, and shape interpersonal relationships. In the educational context, character is not merely about compliance or manners; rather, it involves a coherent and stable set of dispositions such as integrity, empathy, honesty, and respect, which together constitute the foundation for responsible citizenship and constructive social interaction (Husaeni, 2023; Sudirman, 2023). From a developmental perspective, character formation requires sustained exposure to moral reasoning, ethical examples, and value-laden experiences that shape students' identities and their responses to dilemmas in everyday life (Aflisia et al., 2021).

Character education is thus understood as a comprehensive process of nurturing students' moral sensibilities, fostering both their cognitive understanding of ethical principles and their emotional commitment to virtuous behavior. The integration of these components is critical for enabling learners to navigate complex social environments while upholding ethical standards. As such, character education demands more than cognitive instruction; it must engage the whole person (mind, heart, and conduct) through systematic exposure to values, modeling of behavior, and contextual reinforcement.

2.2. Theological Foundations of Character Education in Islamic Pedagogy
In Islamic education, character development is not an optional or peripheral concern but lies at the very core of pedagogical practice. It is grounded in the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic ethical traditions, which collectively provide a moral framework that transcends academic learning and encompasses the formation of virtuous behavior in all areas of life (Mehmood & Siddique, 2025; Rohmah, 2024). Islamic pedagogical models emphasize values such as justice, sincerity, humility, compassion, and honesty as both religious obligations and social imperatives. These values are meant to be integrated holistically into the educational process rather than treated as isolated moral lessons (Juma'ah et al., 2023).

The theological rationale for character education in Islam is deeply rooted in the idea of ta'dib, the comprehensive cultivation of ethical and spiritual refinement. Through this lens, education serves the purpose of nurturing insan kamil (the complete human being) who reflects divine attributes in his or her conduct (Muchasin & Anshori, 2025). Thus, Islamic

schools are seen not only as centers of knowledge transmission but as moral communities where religious teachings are internalized through ritual, social interaction, and guided habituation. The link between belief and action, or iman and amal, underlies the Islamic view that moral integrity must be evident in behavior, a perspective that informs the integration of character education in madrasah life (Irawan, 2025).

2.3. Lickona's Framework and the Components of Character Education

Among the most influential contemporary models of character education is the tripartite framework proposed by Thomas Lickona. His approach divides character into three interrelated components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior (Fandir, 2024). Moral knowing refers to the ability to distinguish right from wrong based on ethical reasoning and knowledge of moral principles. Moral feeling involves emotional attachment to those principles, such as empathy, guilt, and a sense of justice that motivate individuals to act morally. Moral behavior represents the translation of moral understanding and emotional commitment into action.

This framework has been widely adopted in educational theory and practice due to its clarity and comprehensiveness. It emphasizes that effective character education must address all three dimensions simultaneously to be transformative. Programs that focus solely on instruction may fail to instill genuine moral commitment, while those that emphasize feelings without knowledge may lack direction. When combined, these components foster students who not only know what is right but feel compelled to act accordingly, creating a coherent moral identity that is sustained across contexts (Irawan, 2025; Usman et al., 2025).

2.4. Internalizing Values in Islamic Educational Practice

The internalization of values in Islamic education is operationalized through strategies that emphasize repetition, contextual relevance, and social modeling. One method frequently employed is the use of storytelling drawn from Islamic history and prophetic tradition, which offers moral narratives that are accessible and relatable to students (Thoyib et al., 2023). These stories function as ethical case studies, illustrating abstract virtues such as honesty, patience, and forgiveness in tangible scenarios. Their pedagogical power lies in their emotional resonance and cultural familiarity, making them effective tools for moral formation.

Community involvement and experiential learning also play a vital role in internalization. Service-learning projects, cooperative tasks, and participatory school events provide practical opportunities for students to enact values such as compassion, justice, and responsibility in real-life situations (Munawaroh, 2024). Such experiences bridge the gap between classroom instruction and lived behavior, reinforcing the idea that character is formed through repeated ethical practice in authentic settings.

Equally important is the role of teachers as moral exemplars. When educators consistently demonstrate the values they teach, through fairness, humility, patience, and integrity, they serve as living models for students, who often internalize these behaviors through imitation (Icka & Kochoska, 2024). This process highlights that character education is not limited to content but is fundamentally relational and performative. The credibility of the educator is thus central to the success of moral pedagogy.

2.5. Religiosity and Ethical Decision-Making in Students

Religiosity and spirituality provide a potent foundation for ethical decision-making by anchoring values in a transcendent moral order. Studies show that students who identify strongly with their religious beliefs demonstrate heightened moral reasoning and a greater sense of responsibility in their actions (Jing et al., 2021; Ratu et al., 2020). This association is attributed to the internalized belief in divine accountability and the orientation toward communal well-being, both of which discourage unethical conduct.

In Islamic educational contexts, religiosity extends beyond ritual performance to include a moral consciousness that permeates all dimensions of life. It shapes students' interpretation of right and wrong and provides motivation to act ethically even in the absence of external supervision. This internal moral compass is especially critical in environments where students are exposed to competing moral messages from media and peers. Through prayer, reflection, and scriptural engagement, students develop a framework for evaluating their choices and understanding the consequences of their actions (Walia, 2022). As such, religiosity is not only a value in itself but also a mechanism that reinforces other character attributes like honesty, discipline, and tolerance.

2.6. Honesty as a Measurable Outcome in Character Education

Recent research has emphasized the importance of treating honesty not merely as a moral ideal but as a measurable educational outcome. Empirical studies have developed tools such as the Ethical Student Scale to assess students' integrity, truthfulness, and consistency in upholding values in various school contexts (Rua et al., 2024). These instruments allow educators to track progress, diagnose ethical vulnerabilities, and evaluate the effectiveness of character education programs.

Curricular interventions designed to promote honesty have demonstrated positive impacts, showing that intentional teaching combined with supportive environments can enhance students' commitment to truthfulness and accountability (Walidin et al., 2023). Such programs often include discussions on ethical dilemmas, role-playing scenarios, and reflection exercises that enable students to explore the consequences of dishonesty and the social importance of trust. These findings reinforce the notion that honesty can be cultivated through structured pedagogical strategies and that its development is crucial for fostering ethical school cultures.

2.7. Teaching and Practicing Tolerance in Diverse School Settings

Tolerance is increasingly recognized as an essential virtue for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies. In schools characterized by religious and cultural diversity, tolerance is taught through curriculum integration, dialogical learning, and structured interaction among students. Multicultural education introduces students to the histories, perspectives, and contributions of various groups, cultivating respect and reducing prejudice (Aliyani et al., 2023; Zulpandri et al., 2025).

Beyond curricular content, schools also organize workshops, role-plays, and extracurricular activities that promote empathy and open-mindedness. These interactive settings allow students to engage with difference in constructive ways, breaking down stereotypes and building interpersonal trust (Mahdiyah et al., 2024). Experiential learning, such as collaborative community service projects, fosters shared goals and highlights common humanity, reinforcing tolerance as both a cognitive and emotional disposition (Qudsiyah et al., 2025). This educational approach is particularly significant in Islamic schools, which must balance religious identity with civic inclusivity.

2.8. Discipline and the Formation of Responsible Behavior

Discipline is another core value that supports academic achievement and moral development. It refers not only to compliance with rules but also to the cultivation of self-regulation, perseverance, and time management. Educational research confirms that structured environments, clear expectations, and consistent feedback contribute significantly to students' sense of responsibility and behavioral stability (Pratama et al., 2024; Tamam, 2020).

Modern disciplinary models favor restorative approaches over punitive ones, focusing on understanding, accountability, and personal growth. Positive reinforcement and meaningful consequences encourage students to internalize norms and understand the rationale behind rules (Mahdiyah et al., 2024). In this way, discipline becomes a means of moral education rather than mere behavioral control. It teaches students to consider the effects of their actions, accept responsibility, and make better choices in the future (Lahmar, 2020). For madrasahs, this value is often intertwined with religious routines, as punctuality, cleanliness, and respectful demeanor are reinforced through both spiritual and institutional expectations.

2.9. The Role of School Culture in Value Internalization

School culture functions as the environment in which character education either flourishes or fails. A cohesive, ethically oriented school culture, marked by consistent role modeling, mutual respect, and institutional integrity, facilitates the internalization of moral values. When students observe congruence between the values taught and the behavior of teachers and school leaders, they are more likely to accept and embody those values themselves (Hasanah & Sofa, 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Institutional consistency is vital. Schools that maintain clear expectations, equitable discipline, and inclusive practices create a stable moral climate where students can thrive. The alignment between stated principles and lived experiences fosters trust, motivates engagement, and reinforces behavioral norms (Rajaminsah et al., 2022). Furthermore, collaborative initiatives involving teachers, parents, and communities enhance the reach of

character education beyond the classroom, creating a synergistic effect that supports holistic moral formation (Nurdiyanto et al., 2023). In Islamic schools, this cultural dimension is often tied to religious ethos, making the school not only a place of learning but also a space of moral habituation.

The literature provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding character education as a multidimensional, context-sensitive, and spiritually informed process. It underscores the importance of aligning pedagogical strategies, institutional culture, and moral modeling to foster values such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline. These insights inform the present study's exploration of how such values are embedded in the lived culture of an Islamic madrasah, offering a framework for analyzing both the strengths and challenges of character education in faith-based educational environments.

3. Materials and Method

This study employed a qualitative naturalistic design to explore how character education is embedded in the school culture of MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara. The aim was to understand how key values (religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline) are implemented and internalized through institutional practices, teacher modeling, and student experiences.

3.1. Research Design

A qualitative naturalistic approach was chosen for its capacity to capture the complexity of human behavior and institutional culture in educational settings. This design emphasizes the study of phenomena in their natural contexts, offering flexibility in adapting to emerging insights and allowing deep exploration of value-laden practices (Flores, 2023; Rowston et al., 2021). Although this method limits generalizability and may be influenced by researcher subjectivity, its strength lies in revealing nuanced realities often missed by quantitative approaches (Shaleh et al., 2020).

3.2. Research Site and Participants

The research site, MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara, is a state Islamic secondary school located in North Maluku, Indonesia. It was selected purposively due to its commitment to character-based Islamic education. Participants included the head of the madrasah, teachers, and students, sampled based on their relevance to the research focus. This participant diversity ensured a triangulated perspective on institutional practices and cultural norms.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using three interrelated techniques: (a) in-depth interviews explored stakeholders' views on how character values are instilled; (b) participant observation captured real-time routines, rituals, and behavior; and (c) document analysis examined internal school records to contextualize and verify findings. This triangulated approach improved the study's credibility by allowing cross-verification of data from multiple sources (Alamin et al., 2025; Kalender et al., 2023). The integration of subjective accounts and observable practices provided a comprehensive view of character education implementation (Nogues & Tremblay, 2023).

3.4. Data Analysis

Analysis followed an interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Transcripts and field notes were coded thematically, both deductively (based on the research focus) and inductively (emerging from the data). Codes were grouped under the core values of religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline, and displayed through matrices and narratives to identify patterns. Conclusions were verified iteratively by revisiting original data and triangulating across methods to ensure interpretive validity.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and analyzes the findings of the study on character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews, observations, and document analysis, the results are organized around four core values (religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline) that form the foundation of character education at the madrasah. Each value is examined in relation to its implementation, observed outcomes, and supporting or inhibiting factors, followed by an integrated discussion grounded in relevant literature.

4.1. Religiosity as the Moral Framework of School Culture

Religiosity emerged as the most structured and consistently implemented value in the madrasah. Daily religious routines, such as shalat dhuha, collective prayer, recitation of Asmaul Husna, and Quran memorization were observed and confirmed through interviews as habitual practices that begin and end classroom activities. Teachers emphasized the integration of Islamic values into subject matter, such as relating science lessons to the signs of God's creation or reinforcing charity through daily sedekah projects.

These findings align with existing literature indicating that Islamic schools integrate religiosity through formalized rituals and curriculum design (Pamuji & Mawardi, 2023; Syahputra et al., 2024). As Hamami and Nuryana (2022) observe, extracurricular programs such as Quranic competitions and religious workshops are vital platforms for spiritual development and value internalization. In MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara, religiosity functioned not only as an isolated virtue but also as a moral compass that shaped students' approach to other values, such as honesty and discipline.

From a theoretical perspective, this illustrates the centrality of religiosity in Islamic pedagogy, where moral identity is rooted in spiritual consciousness (Juma'ah et al., 2023; Rohmah, 2024). The rituals embedded in the school day foster not just compliance, but reflective engagement with ethical principles, in line with character formation as a holistic moral process (Mehmood & Siddique, 2025). However, consistent with the literature, the sustainability of religiosity as a character foundation depends on reinforcement beyond the classroom, particularly through family and community contexts (Muchasin & Anshori, 2025).

4.2. Operationalizing Honesty Through Habituation and Trust

Honesty was widely observed as both a behavioral expectation and a social norm embedded in classroom and school culture. Teachers described deliberate efforts to foster honesty through example, encouragement, and trust-building. Students were often allowed to complete assessments without strict surveillance, a strategy aimed at cultivating internal responsibility. Teachers also provided feedback and commendations for honest behavior, and students reported being expected to return borrowed items, admit mistakes, and avoid cheating.

These findings confirm Zahra's (2025) assertion that honesty is effectively operationalized through clear behavioral standards and continuous reinforcement. The presence of reflection-based activities, such as classroom discussions on moral consequences or journaling exercises, as suggested by Qudsiyah et al. (2025), was not explicitly documented in this study, though moral conversations were routinely part of teacher-student interaction. Witanti (2025) emphasizes that feedback and recognition are key tools for shaping honest behavior, an approach clearly practiced at MTsN 3.

Such operationalization mirrors Lickona's framework, in which moral action stems from moral knowledge and moral feeling (Fandir, 2024; Irawan, 2025). The madrasah's emphasis on teacher modeling and trust corresponds with research highlighting the power of educator integrity in reinforcing student honesty (Suhartini et al., 2025). However, challenges remain, especially when family environments do not model the same standards, reinforcing the role of school-family collaboration in value reinforcement (Hassan et al., 2025; Junaidin et al., 2025).

4.3. Tolerance in Daily Interaction and Social Climate

Tolerance was reported and observed as a relational value embedded in the daily conduct of students. School leaders and teachers emphasized that students respected educators and peers with differing religious backgrounds. Interviews revealed that students had learned to engage in friendships and group activities without regard to religious or cultural differences, an indication that inclusivity had been normalized within the school environment.

These practices reflect common indicators used to assess tolerance in diverse school settings, including respectful dialogue, inclusive peer relationships, and constructive group interactions (Hasan & Putri, 2020; Majid et al., 2023). At MTsN 3, tolerance was not taught through standalone lessons but modeled through institutional culture, teacher attitudes, and peer norms.

The findings support the argument that tolerance, when cultivated through repeated exposure to respectful interaction, becomes a practiced virtue rather than an abstract ideal (Junaidin et al., 2025). Educational strategies in multicultural settings often incorporate experiential learning, which was evident in the school's approach to group work and

interpersonal engagement (Aliyani et al., 2023; Mahdiyah et al., 2024). Furthermore, projects and conversations that explore cultural diversity, while not always formally structured, were informally embedded in the school's ethical messaging.

This confirms the potential of religious-based education to promote social integration when it upholds values that transcend identity boundaries, such as empathy, respect, and shared humanity (Syafi'i & Shokheh, 2025). In line with Nur et al. (2025) and Ahmad and Mahmudah (2022), the presence of inclusivity in madrasah culture enhances students' readiness to live in diverse societies and contributes to long-term civic harmony.

4.4. Discipline as Punctuality, Rule Compliance, and Self-Regulation
Discipline was consistently described by teachers and students as one of the most visible outcomes of the school's character program. Students arrived punctually, adhered to dress codes, and followed school rules with minimal external enforcement. Moreover, self-regulation was evident in students who performed religious duties, such as shalat dhuha, without being reminded. Teachers noted improvements in student responsibility over time, though they also acknowledged that not all students internalized discipline equally, often due to limited parental support.

These observations align with the indicators commonly used to assess discipline, particularly punctuality and self-regulation, as measures of both behavioral and moral consistency (Sanjani et al., 2024; Taufik & Nurhayati, 2023). While attendance records and rule compliance provide quantifiable evidence of discipline, teacher interviews confirmed the importance of internal motivation and student awareness, which reflect deeper character development.

Discipline in this context aligns with Lickona's notion of moral behavior as practiced and habitual, resulting from repeated reinforcement and modeled consistency (Junaidin et al., 2025). Moreover, the madrasah's efforts to encourage voluntary compliance, such as proactive prayer participation, point toward the formation of self-discipline rather than mere rule obedience.

Nonetheless, structural challenges persist. As the literature suggests, external influences, including inconsistent parenting and digital distractions can inhibit the internalization of discipline (Triwigati, 2022; Wanti et al., 2022). This reinforces the importance of integrated efforts between schools, families, and communities to support lasting moral habits.

4.5. Institutional and Contextual Factors: Supports and Constraints
The successful implementation of character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara was supported by several institutional strengths: a strong religious culture, dedicated teachers who serve as moral exemplars, and consistent school routines. These conditions are consistent with findings by Fajri & Dafit (2022) and (Ansori et al., 2022), who highlight the role of leadership and curriculum integration in fostering character outcomes in madrasahs.

However, inhibiting factors were also identified. Limited family involvement, lack of awareness among some students, and the broader social environment, including peer influence and media exposure posed significant challenges. These constraints are echoed in Wanti et al. (2022) and Sudirman et al. (2023), who emphasize the disruptive role of external environments in sustaining school-based character values.

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive, collaborative strategies, including family engagement, teacher training, and community partnerships, in line with best practices proposed by Uçar et al. (2025) and Maulana et al. (2022). The interplay between school culture, home environment, and societal influences underscores the need for ecosystem-based models of character education (Junaidin et al., 2025; Muñoz & Morales, 2025).

4.6. Linking Findings to Broader Educational and Theoretical Implications
The results of this study reinforce the significance of school-wide character education efforts grounded in consistent practice, teacher modeling, and cultural coherence. This aligns with evidence from regional programs such as Indonesia's "Strengthening Character Education" (PPK) initiative and similar integrative approaches in Malaysia and Thailand, which have shown success in contextualizing moral values within local educational systems (Elihami, 2021; Mansyur et al., 2021; Nisak & Mubarak, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings substantiate the role of character education in moral identity formation, particularly during adolescence, when students develop a clearer sense of values and purpose. As Schipper & Koglin (2021) note, a strong moral identity is closely tied to ethical behavior. By engaging students in routines and relationships grounded in Islamic

ethical principles, the madrasah supports the development of coherent moral selves (Qashmer, 2020).

Finally, the study affirms that religious-based character education, when practiced inclusively, contributes positively to social integration and pluralistic engagement. By promoting tolerance, mutual respect, and civic ethics, madrasahs can be both faith-based and socially integrative, shaping students who are spiritually grounded and socially responsible (Nur et al., 2025; Syafi'i & Shokheh, 2025).

5. Comparison

The findings of this study on the implementation of character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara demonstrate strong alignment with theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies discussed in the background and literature review. This section offers a comparative synthesis by juxtaposing the study's results with earlier conceptual and empirical insights, particularly focusing on the integration of religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline as foundational values in character education.

First, the integration of religiosity into the school's daily life confirms the central role of religious values in Islamic pedagogical models. As highlighted by Rohmah (2024), Mehmood & Siddique (2025), and Juma'ah et al. (2023), Islamic education aims for holistic development, combining cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. The study's evidence, daily prayer, Quran recitation, and religious integration into lessons, mirrors practices described by Syahputra et al. (2024), who emphasized that congregational prayers and religious rituals reinforce community spirit and moral discipline. This embedded religiosity also aligns with the theological orientation in Islamic pedagogy that emphasizes amal shalih (righteous action) as a manifestation of iman (faith), as discussed by Irawan (2025). Thus, the school's emphasis on religiosity is not only a cultural routine but a deliberate moral strategy that supports ethical formation.

Second, the study's findings regarding honesty as a value cultivated through teacher modeling and trust-based learning resonate with Lickona's framework (Junaidin et al., 2025), which identifies moral knowing, feeling, and behavior as essential elements of character formation. The school's emphasis on trust and self-accountability during assessments and classroom activities also confirms Zahra's (2025) view that explicit behavioral norms, combined with ongoing reinforcement, effectively nurture honesty in students. The observed practices reflect the recommendations by Suhartini et al. (2025) and Qudsiyah et al. (2025), who suggest that discussions, reflections, and recognition of honest behavior strengthen students' moral agency. This supports Schipper and Koglin's (2021) assertion that consistent moral experiences contribute directly to moral identity development.

Third, the promotion of tolerance at MTsN 3 reflects a broader educational goal to cultivate inclusive attitudes in multicultural societies. As noted in the literature, schools that emphasize multicultural education, intergroup interaction, and reflective dialogue foster greater acceptance of diversity (Aliyani et al., 2023; Mahdiyah et al., 2024). The school's relational practices, respect for non-Muslim teachers and cross-cultural friendships, closely match indicators of tolerance outlined by Majid et al. (2023) and Hasan & Putri (2020). These practices align with the proposition that tolerance must be embedded in school culture, not merely taught as a concept. This finding reinforces prior claims by Syafi'i & Shokheh (2025) that religious-based education can play a vital role in advancing multicultural integration when it promotes empathy and shared values.

Finally, the cultivation of discipline through punctuality and self-regulation aligns with studies that define discipline as both behavioral and cognitive control. The school's emphasis on proactive student behavior, such as voluntary worship and adherence to rules, corresponds with indicators described by Sanjani et al. (2024) and Taufik & Nurhayati (2023). The results support the notion that discipline is most effectively internalized through structured routines and positive reinforcement rather than external compulsion (Junaidin et al., 2025; Mahdiyah et al., 2024).

In sum, this study corroborates and extends existing theories and empirical findings by demonstrating that character education, when embedded in school culture and supported by consistent role modeling, fosters moral values effectively. It also reinforces the importance of collaborative alignment between educational institutions, families, and broader communities, as emphasized in the dual-process model of moral socialization (Hassan et al., 2025; Muñoz & Morales, 2025). This comparative perspective confirms the relevance and applicability of character education frameworks in the context of Islamic schooling in Indonesia.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of character education at MTsN 3 Halmahera Utara by focusing on four core values—religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline—within the framework of school culture. The findings demonstrate that character education in this madrasah is not treated as a separate or supplementary program but is embedded in daily routines, pedagogical practices, and interpersonal relationships. Through consistent habituation, teacher exemplarity, and institutional coherence, character values are translated into observable behaviors and gradually internalized by students.

The results show that religiosity functions as the moral foundation of the school culture. Daily worship practices, integration of Islamic values into subject content, and religious extracurricular activities create a structured moral environment that supports ethical awareness and self-regulation. Honesty is fostered through trust-based learning, clear integrity norms, and consistent modeling by teachers, reinforcing students' sense of responsibility and moral agency. Tolerance emerges as a relational value embedded in everyday interactions, reflected in respectful attitudes toward religious and cultural differences and inclusive peer relationships. Discipline is manifested through punctuality, adherence to rules, and growing self-regulation, although its internalization remains influenced by family support and external social factors.

From the discussion, it is evident that the effectiveness of character education depends heavily on the coherence between school culture, leadership, teacher practices, and reinforcement beyond the school environment. While the madrasah demonstrates strong institutional commitment, challenges such as uneven parental involvement and broader societal influences highlight the limits of school-based efforts when not supported by families and communities. These findings reinforce theoretical perspectives that conceptualize character as a practiced and socially reinforced disposition rather than merely a cognitive understanding of moral values.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in several ways. First, it provides empirical evidence from an Islamic junior secondary school context, illustrating how character education can be operationalized as a holistic cultural process rather than a programmatic intervention. Second, it enriches character education literature by examining religiosity, honesty, tolerance, and discipline as interconnected values within a single institutional ecology. Third, the study offers context-sensitive insights from a peripheral region of Indonesia, thereby broadening the geographical and cultural scope of research on character education in madrasahs.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that school leaders should prioritize cultural consistency, support teacher development as moral role models, and strengthen collaboration with families to enhance the sustainability of character education outcomes. For policymakers, the study underscores the importance of aligning national character education frameworks with school-level cultural practices.

Future research is recommended to extend this inquiry through comparative studies across multiple madrasahs and regions, as well as longitudinal designs to examine the durability of character outcomes over time. Mixed-method approaches that integrate qualitative insights with quantitative measures may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of character education initiatives. Overall, this study affirms the significance of school culture as a decisive medium for moral formation and highlights the potential of Islamic educational institutions to contribute meaningfully to character development in pluralistic societies.

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