

MADRASAH LEADERSHIP IN STRENGTHENING CHARACTER EDUCATION (PPK) AT MTs HABIBI NURUL AIN BANGOMOLUNOW

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Abstract: Strengthening character education in Islamic junior secondary schools requires more than the implementation of religious activities and routine practices; it requires leadership capable of integrating character values into institutional culture in a consistent and sustainable manner. This study examines the leadership of a madrasah principal in strengthening character education at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow, with particular attention to program planning, mobilizing members of the madrasah community, habituation and role modeling, supervision, evaluation, and the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting implementation. A qualitative case study design was employed from April to May 2026. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis and were analyzed descriptively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was enhanced through source and methodological triangulation. The findings indicate that the madrasah principal exercised values-based leadership through role modeling, religious habituation, the integration of character values into classroom instruction, teacher development, supervision, and communication with parents and community members. Character strengthening emerged through the interconnected processes of leadership vision, institutional policies, habituation, role modeling, collaboration, supervision, and evaluation. Key supporting factors included the principal's commitment, support from teachers and educational staff, a conducive madrasah culture, and family and community involvement. Major challenges included uneven teacher understanding of character education, limited facilities, inconsistent implementation, unequal parental involvement, and the challenges associated with digital technology. The study contributes to the understanding of character leadership in madrasahs by demonstrating that the principal's role needs to extend beyond program implementation toward becoming an architect of a sustainable character-education system through formal

procedures, character indicators, systematic documentation, supervision, and evidence-based evaluation. Thus, the effectiveness of character education depends not on the number of activities conducted, but on the capacity of madrasah leadership to transform character values into an institutional culture and sustained student behavior.

Keywords: madrasah leadership; character education; madrasah culture; Islamic education

Abstrak: Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter (PPK) di madrasah tidak cukup diwujudkan melalui penyelenggaraan kegiatan keagamaan dan pembiasaan, tetapi memerlukan kepemimpinan yang mampu mengintegrasikan nilai karakter ke dalam budaya kelembagaan secara konsisten dan berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kepemimpinan kepala madrasah dalam penguatan pendidikan karakter di MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow, khususnya dalam perencanaan, pergerakan warga madrasah, pembiasaan dan keteladanan, supervisi, evaluasi, serta faktor pendukung dan penghambat implementasi PPK. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus yang dilaksanakan pada April–Mei 2026. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif-kualitatif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala madrasah menjalankan kepemimpinan berbasis nilai melalui keteladanan, pembiasaan religius, integrasi karakter dalam pembelajaran, pembinaan guru, supervisi, serta komunikasi dengan orang tua dan masyarakat. Penguatan karakter berlangsung melalui keterhubungan antara visi kepemimpinan, kebijakan, pembiasaan, keteladanan, kolaborasi, supervisi, dan evaluasi. Faktor pendukung meliputi komitmen kepala madrasah, dukungan guru dan tenaga kependidikan, budaya madrasah yang kondusif, serta keterlibatan keluarga dan masyarakat. Sementara itu, hambatan mencakup pemahaman sebagian guru yang belum optimal, keterbatasan fasilitas, ketidakkonsistenan implementasi, keterlibatan orang tua yang belum merata, dan tantangan penggunaan teknologi digital. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa kepala madrasah perlu bergerak dari sekadar pelaksana program menjadi arsitek sistem keberlanjutan PPK melalui penyusunan SOP, indikator karakter, dokumentasi program, supervisi, dan evaluasi berbasis bukti. Dengan demikian, keberhasilan PPK tidak ditentukan oleh banyaknya kegiatan, tetapi oleh kemampuan kepemimpinan madrasah mengubah nilai karakter menjadi budaya kelembagaan dan perilaku yang terinternalisasi.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan kepala madrasah; pendidikan karakter; budaya madrasah; pendidikan Islam

Introduction

Character education has become one of the major priorities of educational policy in Indonesia since the Strengthening Character Education (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter/PPK*) program was formally introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2017. The PPK program emphasizes the integration of moral, social, and cultural values into all aspects of school life, including the curriculum, school culture, and daily habituation practices. Accordingly, character formation is not regarded merely as the responsibility of a particular subject, but as a shared responsibility involving all stakeholders within the school community (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017).

Education, in essence, is not solely concerned with equipping students with knowledge but also with guiding them to use that knowledge responsibly in their daily lives. Amid rapid social change, the advancement of digital technology, and the diverse environmental influences encountered by adolescents, character development has become an increasingly important concern. Schools and madrasahs are therefore expected not only to produce academically competent students but also to foster individuals who are religious, disciplined, responsible, independent, caring, and capable of positioning themselves appropriately within social life. Within the Indonesian educational context, strengthening character education is consequently not merely an additional component of the learning process but an essential part of efforts to develop well-rounded individuals. A study of trends in character education in Indonesia indicates that character education in formal educational institutions is directed toward developing social and spiritual attitudes that can serve as essential foundations for students' everyday lives (Susilo et al., 2022).

However, character cannot be developed solely through the delivery of advice or classroom instruction. Character develops through a prolonged process involving role modelling, habituation, consistent rules, social interaction, and the culture established within the educational environment. In other words, character values are more likely to become internalized when students observe, experience, and consistently practice them in their everyday lives. Research on school-culture-based character education demonstrates

that character strengthening needs to be pursued through the integration of values, habituation, role modelling, the creation of a supportive environment, and the evaluation of students' character development (Khasanah et al., 2022). Similarly, research at the secondary-school level indicates that character education can be strengthened when supported by exemplary behaviour, discipline, habituation, a conducive learning environment, and the involvement of the entire school community (Kholidin et al., 2025).

In the context of madrasahs, this need has a distinctive dimension. Madrasahs not only fulfil the function of general education but also bear responsibility for instilling Islamic values and fostering students' moral character. Activities such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation (*tadarus*), collective prayer, the habituation of polite behaviour, social activities, and flag ceremonies can serve as concrete means of bringing religious and national values together in students' everyday lives. Nevertheless, the existence of such activities does not, in itself, guarantee successful character formation. Activities initially intended as processes of value internalization may lose their meaning when they are perceived merely as routines that must be performed. Research in Islamic secondary schools indicates that the development of religious and national character becomes stronger when religious activities, national rituals, teacher role modelling, and institutional regulations are integrated into a coherent school culture (Aziz & Sholikah, 2026).

Strengthening character education places, the head of the madrasah at the centre of the process of transforming moral and spiritual values within the educational environment (Mulyasa, 2021). The head of the madrasah does not merely function as an administrative manager responsible for ensuring the implementation of teaching and learning activities but also serves as a moral leader who becomes a primary role model for teachers, students, and the broader madrasah community. In this context, the head of the madrasah is responsible for cultivating character values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and social concern through exemplary conduct and policies oriented toward the development of virtuous character. Moral leadership requires the head of the madrasah to demonstrate a high level of integrity, commitment to Islamic values, and the capacity to inspire members of the

madrasah community to regard character education as an integral and sustainable component of school culture (Suyatno, 2020).

At this point, the leadership of the head of the madrasah becomes particularly strategic. The head of the madrasah is not merely an administrative manager but an actor who determines the direction, culture, and consistency of educational programs. A character education program is unlikely to be implemented sustainably without leadership capable of translating values into policies, building teachers' commitment, providing exemplary leadership, conducting supervision, and ensuring systematic evaluation. Research on student character development in Islamic secondary schools indicates that the head of the madrasah assumes roles as a controller, supervisor, and manager, while teachers perform practical functions as role models, communicators, facilitators, implementers, and evaluators (Syamsuddin et al., 2022). Thus, the success of character education cannot be determined solely by the number of character-building activities organized, but also by how the head of the madrasah directs the entire madrasah community to understand the objectives, implement programs consistently, and embed character values within the institutional culture.

Furthermore, the head of the madrasah also serves as a **change agent** capable of mobilizing teachers and students to internalize character values through learning activities and everyday life in the madrasah (Aqib & Sujak, 2021). In the role of facilitator, the head of the madrasah creates a learning environment conducive to the development of a character-oriented culture, including through religious activities, counselling services, and the integration of character values into the curriculum (Marzuki, 2022). The head of the madrasah is also expected to develop an objective and continuous character evaluation system so that the implementation of PPK does not remain limited to ceremonial activities but becomes part of a comprehensive and measurable educational system. Accordingly, the success of character education in madrasahs is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of the head of the madrasah's leadership in creating synergy among the moral, managerial, and spiritual dimensions of Islamic education (Wahjosumidjo, 2020).

In the context of Islamic junior secondary schools (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah*/MTs), this leadership role often encounters additional challenges,

particularly in integrating religious values with the national curriculum and engaging religious leaders and the surrounding community (Sari & Rahman, 2020). Various case studies at the madrasah level indicate that although PPK programs and modules are available, their implementation in practice often encounters obstacles, including weak written planning and standard operating procedures (SOPs), limited teacher understanding of character-habitation strategies, inconsistencies in reinforcing values beyond the classroom, and the insufficient effectiveness of madrasah leadership in serving as role models and managing the broader school ecosystem (Gus Nafi Unnur Hasan & Isham Adrisna Kurniawan, 2026).

Preliminary observations at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow identified several issues relevant to the implementation of Strengthening Character Education (PPK). In general, character-building activities such as congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and flag ceremonies have been routinely conducted; however, their implementation has not yet demonstrated strong consistency across the madrasah community. Some teachers continue to perceive these activities primarily as religious routines rather than as integral components of a broader character education strategy. In addition, there is currently no written Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that systematically regulates the implementation of the PPK program in terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The documentation of program activities is also not yet well organized, making it difficult to trace program achievements and identify the challenges encountered during implementation.

This issue becomes particularly relevant when examined in relation to the actual conditions observed in the field. Preliminary observations at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow indicate that the madrasah already has various activities with the potential to support character education, including congregational prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and routinely conducted flag ceremonies. The existence of these activities indicates that the madrasah possesses an initial foundation for developing a character-oriented culture. Nevertheless, their implementation has not yet demonstrated strong consistency across the madrasah community. Some teachers continue to perceive these activities merely as religious routines rather than as integral

components of a character education strategy. This condition points to a more fundamental issue: character-building activities are already in place, but their meaning, management, and oversight have not yet been fully integrated into a coherent system.

Another issue concerns the absence of written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that systematically regulate the implementation of the character education program, from planning and implementation to evaluation. The absence of clear guidelines may result in program implementation becoming highly dependent on individual habits and initiatives. Consequently, implementation standards may vary from one activity to another, while program sustainability becomes more vulnerable to changes in personnel and institutional circumstances. Research on character-value management at the secondary-school level highlights the importance of a structured process encompassing planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation to ensure that character values are genuinely incorporated into school management (Sipiana et al., 2019).

The inadequate organization of program documentation also constitutes an important concern. Documentation is not merely an administrative requirement; it is part of a mechanism for determining the extent to which a program has been implemented, identifying the outcomes achieved, examining the challenges encountered, and determining the improvements required. Research on the evaluation of character education indicates that planning, the determination of priority values, program design, and evaluation are essential components for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of character education implementation (Murcahyanto & Mohzana, 2023a). Therefore, the documentation issue at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow should not be viewed merely as an administrative deficiency but also as a managerial concern that may affect the madrasah's capacity to reflect on and continuously develop its PPK program.

This phenomenon demonstrates that the principal challenge in character education does not always lie in the absence of programs, but rather in how such programs are led, interpreted, organized, implemented consistently, and evaluated. Research on school leadership strategies for strengthening character indicates that school leaders need to establish short-

and long-term programs, determine program indicators, assess performance, compare outcomes against predetermined targets, and undertake corrective actions based on evaluation results (Satria & Shahbana, 2020). These findings reinforce the view that the leadership of the head of the madrasah should be examined not merely in terms of the ability to implement existing activities but also in terms of the capacity to establish a system that makes character education planned, directed, consistent, and sustainable.

Recent developments in research have also increasingly highlighted the relationship between leadership and character-oriented school culture. Research in religiously affiliated schools has found that school leaders serve as *change agents* through exemplary leadership, supervision, monitoring, evaluation, and sustained motivation of members of the school community. More recent research on leadership in Islamic education further indicates that leadership emphasizing spiritual role modelling, empathy, teacher empowerment, and active communication can strengthen collaboration and integrity among members of the madrasah community (Elviana & Azkiya', 2026). These findings underscore the important position of the head of the madrasah in transforming character education from a collection of individual activities into a living culture within the madrasah environment.

Accordingly, this article examines the leadership of the head of the madrasah in strengthening character education at MT's Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow, with particular attention to how the head of the madrasah plans and directs the PPK program, mobilizes teachers and members of the madrasah community, develops habituation and role modelling, conducts supervision, and evaluates its implementation. The study also examines the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the strengthening of character education in the madrasah. Through this analysis, the study seeks to demonstrate that the success of character education should not be assessed merely by the number of activities conducted, but by the extent to which madrasah leadership is able to transform character values into a shared culture that is understood, exemplified, practiced, and consistently evaluated by the entire madrasah community.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to develop an in-depth understanding of the leadership strategies employed by the head of the madrasah in strengthening character education (PPK) and improving the quality of Islamic education. A qualitative approach enables researchers to examine phenomena within their natural settings while taking into account participants' experiences, perspectives, and interactions within the madrasah community (Meeuwissen et al., 2021).

The study was conducted at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow from April to May 2026. The research site was purposively selected because its institutional context was closely aligned with the focus of the study, particularly madrasah leadership, character education, and the improvement of Islamic education quality. Participants were also selected purposively and consisted of the head of the madrasah, teachers, educational staff, and students who were considered capable of providing relevant information concerning the research focus (Charette et al., 2019).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and accounts of the leadership strategies implemented by the head of the madrasah. Participant observation was used to obtain first-hand information about leadership practices, learning activities, and character-building routines within the madrasah. Documents were examined to complement the interview and observation findings and to provide additional evidence relevant to the research focus (Donato et al., 2020; Torti et al., 2022).

The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. The analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Initially, the collected information was carefully selected and organized according to themes emerging from the research focus. The relevant data were then presented narratively to identify recurring patterns and interpretive meanings associated with madrasah leadership, character education, and the quality of Islamic education (Suchyadi et al., 2026).

The trustworthiness of the data was established through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants, while technique triangulation involved examining the consistency of findings derived from interviews, observations, and documents. The use of a qualitative case study design was therefore considered appropriate for capturing the contextual and in-depth nature of the phenomenon under investigation, particularly how the head of the madrasah implements leadership strategies and how these strategies relate to the strengthening of character education and the improvement of Islamic education quality.

Results and Discussion

The Leadership of the Head of the Madrasah as a Driver of Character-Value Internalization

The findings indicate that the leadership of the head of the madrasah at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow extends beyond administrative responsibilities and has developed into a value-based form of leadership that directs various aspects of madrasah life toward students' character development. This is reflected in the habituation of *Duha* prayer, congregational *Dhuhr* prayer, the recitation of *Asmaul Husna* and *dhikr*, social activities, and the integration of discipline, honesty, responsibility, and religiosity into classroom learning. The head of the madrasah is also directly involved through classroom supervision, guidance for teachers, reflection during staff meetings, and communication with parents and religious leaders. These findings suggest that character development within the madrasah does not result from a single stand-alone program but from the interaction of policies, role modelling, habituation, classroom learning, and social relationships.

The significance of this finding lies in the role of the head of the madrasah as a bridge between normative values and the practices experienced by students in their everyday lives. Religious values, for example, are not presented merely as abstract concepts concerning religious obligations but are embodied through routines that allow students to experience and practice these values directly. Similarly, discipline and responsibility are not cultivated

solely through verbal instruction but are reinforced through rules, teacher role modelling, supervision, and students' participation in madrasah activities. This pattern supports the view that character education is more likely to be effective when values are embedded within the institutional culture rather than treated merely as instructional content.

This finding is consistent with Hayati et al. (2022), who demonstrated that school-culture-based religious character education can be developed through a religious school climate, religious activities, the integration of values into learning, and relationships between schools and the wider community. Their study also found that a school-culture approach contributes to increased religious awareness and tolerance among students.

In the context of MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow, these practices become particularly meaningful because the head of the madrasah does not delegate responsibility for character development solely to Islamic Religious Education teachers. Instead, the head of the madrasah encourages all teachers to integrate character values into the learning process. This reflects a shift from understanding *character education as a program* toward understanding *character education as an organizational culture*. This shift is important because the sustainability of character education depends not simply on the number of activities conducted, but on the institution's capacity to establish values as shared standards of behaviour.

The findings further demonstrate the importance of the head of the madrasah's role modelling. Teachers' accounts that leadership is manifested through example, direction, guidance, and program consistency indicate that members of the madrasah community learn values not only from what their leader says but also from what the leader does. The findings of Mustar et al. (2025) reinforce this interpretation. In the Indonesian madrasah context, school leadership has been found to influence teacher character development through value-based role modelling, the cultivation of institutional culture, reflective professional development, and the integration of spirituality with professional practice.

Accordingly, the changes in students' character identified in this study should not be understood solely as consequences of religious activities. Rather, these changes can be interpreted as emerging from an internalization

process established through repeated interactions among the leader, teachers, institutional rules, habituation practices, and the madrasah's social environment. Research on religious culture likewise indicates that routine activities such as congregational prayer, religious programs, and supportive school policies can create an environment that encourages teachers and students to internalize religious values in their everyday lives (Jumahir et al., 2023).

Another factor strengthening the leadership of the head of the madrasah is direct supervision. The head of the madrasah does not merely review teachers' administrative requirements but also observes classroom practices and provides feedback concerning how teachers interact with students. This practice indicates a shift from administrative monitoring toward developmental supervision. Teachers are therefore not simply expected to produce instructional documents but are also encouraged to demonstrate how character values are genuinely reflected in pedagogical interactions.

This finding is consistent with Yumnah et al. (2024), who found that teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership were associated with teacher self-efficacy in carrying out educational processes. In other words, the support provided by the head of the madrasah extends beyond program implementation and also relates to teachers' readiness to serve as the primary agents of character education.

From a broader perspective, these findings suggest that character-oriented leadership in madrasahs should be understood as a form of leadership that integrates moral, spiritual, instructional, and managerial dimensions. An effective head of the madrasah is not merely a leader capable of designing programs but one who can translate values into habits, transform habits into culture, and ultimately develop culture into an institutional identity. This finding reinforces the study by Iskandar et al. (2026), which demonstrated that Islamic leadership characterized by trustworthiness, participation, and consistency can establish a religious culture that becomes internalized in school life and contributes to students' holistic character development.

The practical implication of this finding is that strengthening PPK in madrasahs needs to begin with strengthening leadership capacity. Character programs are more likely to be sustained when the head of the madrasah serves as a role model, builds teachers' commitment, conducts meaningful supervision, and ensures that character values are present throughout the various dimensions of madrasah life. Consequently, the success of PPK should not be assessed merely by the number of activities implemented but by the extent to which these values have become established habits and patterns of interaction within the madrasah environment.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors: Internal Culture, Family Engagement, and Digital Challenges

The findings indicate that the effectiveness of the head of the madrasah's leadership is shaped by the interaction between internal and external factors. The strongest internal factors include the commitment and role modelling of the head of the madrasah, support from teachers and educational staff, a conducive madrasah culture, and the availability of character-development programs. External factors include parental involvement, community support, students' social environments, and developments in digital technology. These findings indicate that character education is fundamentally an ecological process: although the madrasah has a significant influence, it does not operate within a socially isolated environment.

Internally, the commitment of the head of the madrasah emerges as the most influential factor because leadership functions as a mechanism for coordinating and directing available resources. A consistent head of the madrasah can align teachers, educational staff, students, and parents around shared objectives. Under such conditions, limited resources do not necessarily constitute the primary barrier because a strong institutional culture and collective commitment can function as forms of social capital. Fiqri et al. (2025), for example, demonstrated that schools operating under resource constraints can still develop character education systematically through leadership commitment, a collaborative culture, parental and community involvement, and adaptation to local conditions.

The findings also show that the support provided by the head of the madrasah to teachers through motivation, training, discussion, and the provision of facilities is important in addressing limitations in teacher capacity. This indicates that character education cannot be assigned to teachers as an individual responsibility. Teachers require direction, professional development, opportunities for reflection, and institutional support. Similarly, Solehah et al. (2025) found that role modelling, habituation, the integration of values into learning, and positive reinforcement become more effective when supported by school leadership, teacher collaboration, parental involvement, adequate facilities, and institutional policies.

However, this study also identified several issues requiring greater attention, including limited understanding of PPK among some teachers, inadequate facilities, insufficient parental involvement, and inconsistencies in implementation. These conditions reveal a gap between programs that have been normatively designed and the institutional capacity to implement them consistently. In this context, the existence of a program does not automatically produce changes in students' character when implementing actors have different understandings of the objectives and strategies of character education.

This finding is consistent with Khasanah et al. (2022), who demonstrated that character education management needs to encompass planning, organizing, implementation, supervision, and evaluation. Character education becomes stronger when values are integrated into subjects, reinforced through habituation and role modelling, and supported by a consistent school environment.

Interestingly, parental involvement in this study functions not only as a supporting factor but also as one of the potential vulnerabilities of the PPK program. Character development established at the madrasah may be strengthened or weakened when students return to their homes and broader social environments. Therefore, communication between the head of the madrasah, parents, and the community has strategic significance. Character education is more likely to be strengthened when the values promoted by the

madrasah are not contradicted by the social practices encountered by students within their families and communities.

At this point, research on the internalization of Islamic values also demonstrates that parental involvement, teacher role modelling, habituation, and systematic institutional reinforcement can jointly strengthen students' religious discipline, morality, and social responsibility. Conversely, limited time, digital distractions, and inconsistent student motivation may hinder this process (Laili et al., 2025).

The technological challenges identified in this study warrant a more critical interpretation. The head of the madrasah identified uncontrolled technological development as one of the challenges to character education. Technology, however, should not necessarily be viewed as an inherently negative factor. The more fundamental issue concerns the ability of students and the adults around them to use technology ethically, critically, and responsibly. From this perspective, technology should not be treated solely as something to be controlled but also as a new domain in which character education can take place.

Rochim and Amal Khayati (2023) found that religious character education in the digital era requires teachers to perform multiple roles, including facilitator, mentor, communicator, role model, evaluator, and innovator. Their study emphasizes the importance of connecting religious learning with digital developments so that students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of contemporary life.

Accordingly, the findings of this study suggest that strengthening PPK at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain should not be limited to restricting students' use of technology but should also promote the development of digital character. Students need guidance in assuming responsibility when using social media, distinguishing reliable from unreliable information, communicating ethically, recognizing the consequences of their digital actions, and using technology for constructive purposes. Hamzah et al. (2025) demonstrated that digital literacy can enhance adolescents' capacity to evaluate information, understand ethical consequences, and respond constructively to social issues in digital spaces.

Thus, the inhibiting factors identified in this study also create opportunities for institutional innovation. Limitations in teacher competence can be addressed through continuous professional development; insufficient parental involvement can be responded to through strengthened communication and parenting programs; while technological challenges can be transformed into opportunities through character-oriented digital literacy. Through such an approach, the leadership of the head of the madrasah becomes not merely reactive in responding to problems but adaptive in transforming emerging social challenges into new opportunities for learning.

The social implications of these findings are also considerable. When madrasahs are able to establish synergy among schools, families, communities, and digital spaces, character education has the potential to develop students who are not only religious in terms of ritual practice but also socially responsible, adaptable, and ethically competent in contemporary life. In other words, religious character should not be separated from civic character and digital competence; these dimensions need to develop concurrently.

Evaluation and Institutionalization of PPK as a Strategy for Sustainable Madrasah Quality

The third major finding indicates that the head of the madrasah has conducted evaluation through academic supervision, observation of learning activities, assessment of students' attitudes and behaviour, and reflective meetings with teachers and educational staff. The results of these evaluations are subsequently used to improve instructional strategies, strengthen habituation practices, and formulate subsequent policies. This practice indicates that the head of the madrasah understands character education as a process requiring continuous improvement.

The significance of this finding lies in the extent to which the sustainability of PPK depends on the madrasah's ability to transform implementation experiences into institutional knowledge. An activity that proves successful during one period may not produce similar results in subsequent periods if its implementation is not documented, evaluated, and used as a basis for improvement. Evaluation, therefore, should not be

regarded merely as the final stage of a program but as a mechanism that connects past experiences with subsequent planning.

This finding is relevant to Murcahyanto and Mohzana (2023), who demonstrated that character education evaluation needs to consider context, input, process, and product. Their study found that program planning and character internalization outcomes could be implemented relatively well, although the identification of priority values and infrastructure support remained areas requiring further strengthening.

In the context of MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow, this issue is particularly important because preliminary observations indicated the absence of systematically documented PPK SOPs and the inadequate organization of program documentation. These field findings reveal a paradox: character education practices are already taking place, but some of the knowledge underlying these practices remains embedded in individual experience and established routines rather than being fully incorporated into an institutional system.

Such a condition may create risks for program sustainability. When a program depends heavily on a particular head of the madrasah or individual teachers, its effectiveness may decline following personnel changes, shifts in policy, or changes in organizational conditions. Effective leadership therefore needs to move from personal leadership toward institutionalization. SOPs, character indicators, observation instruments, activity records, supervision notes, and reflective forums need to be developed so that character education does not depend primarily on individual memory or initiative.

Halim et al. (2026) reinforce this argument. Their research on character education management in madrasahs indicates that effective programs are developed through systematic planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation, with teacher role modelling, habituation, parental involvement, and evidence-based evaluation serving as important components.

Accordingly, the findings of this study extend the understanding of the role of the head of the madrasah. The head of the madrasah is not only the leader responsible for implementing PPK but also needs to function as an architect of a sustainable PPK system. The distinction between these two

positions is important. As an implementer, the head of the madrasah ensures that activities are carried out; as a system architect, the head of the madrasah ensures that these activities have clear objectives, standards, indicators, documentation, evaluation mechanisms, and follow-up actions.

With regard to evaluation, changes in students' behaviour should also be interpreted cautiously. Teachers' observations that students have become more disciplined, religious, and respectful provide positive indications, but they are insufficient to establish that all such changes are direct outcomes of PPK. Character is a complex construct that develops over an extended period. Changes in student behaviour may also be shaped by family influences, peer relationships, developmental processes, social environments, and experiences outside the madrasah. Therefore, character evaluation should not rely solely on teachers' subjective impressions but should be complemented by observable behavioural indicators assessed periodically.

In this regard, research has shown that character education can be evaluated through attitude assessment and direct observation of students' behaviour (Khasanah et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Zulkarnen et al. (2026) emphasized that Islamic school culture needs to be accompanied by more measurable indicators so that its contribution to educational quality and professionalism can be evaluated more clearly.

On this basis, this study provides a practical contribution by highlighting the need to develop a more structured PPK evaluation system at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow. Such indicators may include attendance and participation in activities, responsibility for assigned tasks, honesty, respectful communication, social concern, consistency in religious practices, collaborative ability, and ethical technology use. Assessment does not necessarily need to involve complex quantitative procedures; rather, it can employ simple observation sheets that are applied consistently by teachers and reviewed periodically by the head of the madrasah.

Furthermore, documentation can be developed not merely as an administrative archive but as a form of institutional memory. Program documentation may include the objectives of an activity, participants, activity procedures, observation results, challenges encountered, follow-up actions, and teacher reflections. When maintained consistently, such documentation

can help the madrasah identify which programs are effective, which activities require improvement, and which character values require further reinforcement.

From the perspective of educational quality, this practice can also connect PPK with the improvement of Islamic education quality. High-quality Islamic education should not be defined solely by academic achievement but also by its capacity to produce graduates who possess moral integrity and are able to apply religious values in social life. Sembiring and Budi (2025) found that visionary and communicative school leadership oriented toward teachers' professional development can foster a culture of educational quality while maintaining a balance between academic achievement and Islamic character development.

Thus, the principal contribution of this study is not merely to demonstrate that the head of the madrasah plays an important role in PPK but also to illustrate the mechanisms through which such leadership operates. Leadership becomes effective when values are translated into policies, policies are enacted through habituation, habituation is reinforced through teacher role modelling, implementation is monitored through supervision, and the resulting evidence is used to guide improvement. This pattern can be understood as a character leadership cycle: vision → role modelling → habituation → collaboration → supervision → evaluation → continuous improvement.

Overall, the three major findings indicate that character education at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow has a relatively strong foundation, particularly through the role modelling of the head of the madrasah, teacher support, religious habituation, supervision, and the involvement of parents and the wider community. Nevertheless, these strengths need to be consolidated into a more documented, measurable, and adaptive institutional system capable of responding to social and technological change. The next challenge, therefore, is not simply to add more character-building activities but to ensure that every activity has clear pedagogical meaning, is implemented consistently, is evaluated on the basis of evidence, and contributes to behavioural changes that can endure beyond the madrasah environment.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the understanding that the leadership of the head of the madrasah represents a strategic factor in the success of character education, but such leadership does not operate in isolation. Its effectiveness emerges from the ability of the head of the madrasah to build an ecosystem that brings teachers, students, families, communities, madrasah culture, and technology together around a shared value orientation. In this context, the success of PPK means more than producing students who are disciplined and religious while they are at school. It also entails developing individuals who are able to carry values of honesty, responsibility, social concern, tolerance, and ethical conduct into their family lives, communities, and digital spaces. This represents the more substantive meaning of character education: not merely encouraging students to behave well at school, but developing their capacity to recognize and choose what is right and to act accordingly even when they are no longer under the direct supervision of the school.

Conclusion

The leadership of the head of the madrasah represents a strategic factor in strengthening Character Education (PPK) at MTs Habibi Nurul Ain Bangomolunow. This leadership extends beyond administrative management and functions as a driver of value internalization through role modelling, religious habituation, the integration of character values into learning, teacher development, supervision, and strengthened relationships with families and the wider community. This leadership pattern demonstrates that the effectiveness of PPK depends on the madrasah's capacity to translate normative values into practices that are repeatedly enacted and gradually developed into an institutional culture.

The implementation of PPK is supported by the commitment of the head of the madrasah, collaboration among teachers and educational staff, a conducive madrasah culture, and support from families and the wider community. Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges, including limited understanding of PPK among some teachers, inadequate facilities, inconsistencies in implementation, uneven parental involvement, and challenges associated with the use of digital technology. These conditions

indicate that the sustainability of PPK requires adaptive leadership supported by a stronger institutional system.

The principal contribution of this study lies in emphasizing that the head of the madrasah needs to move beyond the role of program implementer toward that of an architect of a sustainable PPK system. Further strengthening should focus on the development of clear SOPs, character indicators, systematic program documentation, meaningful supervision, and continuous evidence-based evaluation. Accordingly, the success of PPK should not be determined merely by the number of activities conducted, but by the extent to which the madrasah is able to foster character values that become internalized and are reflected in students' behaviour within the madrasah, family, community, and digital environments

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