

Managing Character Education to Improve Student Achievement: Evidence from Two Islamic Elementary Schools in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Character education management is essential for Islamic elementary schools because it supports the development of students' religious values, discipline, responsibility, and academic achievement. This study aims to examine how character education is managed to improve student achievement in two Islamic elementary schools in Malang City, Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design at MIN 1 Malang City and MIN 2 Malang City. The research sites were selected purposively because both madrasahs have established flagship character education programs and consistent academic and non-academic achievements. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving school principals, vice principals, teachers, homeroom teachers, school committee members, parents, and students. The data were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings show that character education management in both madrasahs is implemented through four main functions: planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation. MIN 1 Malang City applies the PAKUBUMI program, which emphasizes moral development, worship habituation, and Islamic culture. MIN 2 Malang City implements the Smart, Religious, and Fun program through the Panca Bina framework, which strengthens spirituality, creativity, discipline, and student confidence. Both programs contribute to improved learning discipline, religious habits, motivation, and academic and non-academic achievement. The study proposes the MPC Model—Integrated Character Formation Management—as a holistic framework for managing character education in Islamic elementary schools. The model highlights the importance of systematic management, teacher role modeling, habituation, parental involvement, and evidence-based evaluation in strengthening student character and achievement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of character education for early childhood and elementary school is a major concern in Islamic education today. Various studies have provided ample evidence that strengthening religious character is crucial for strengthening the mental resilience of today's children and adolescents, as they will become future leaders. George, in Hamdi, argues that leadership failure is a failure of character (Yusliani, 2022). Technological developments and social change present challenges for the behavior of elementary school-aged children (Covey, 1989). Phenomena such as declining social ethics, indiscipline, lack of concern, and low motivation to learn are issues that need to be addressed through systematic character development.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools) excel in instilling Islamic values, thus offering significant potential for character education through religious culture, habituation of worship, teacher role models, and social conditioning (Santoso, 2025). However, many institutions implement character education partially, without a management system, and without measuring it in relation to student achievement.

Various field studies that have been conducted previously show that values such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and independence are positively correlated with academic grades, learning motivation, class participation, and orderly behavior (Harefa, 2025). At the secondary school level, it was also found that the integration of character in learning (for example, science) increases mastery of concepts, motivation, and average test scores. Quantitatively, character education is a significant predictor of learning achievement in junior high schools/Islamic junior high schools. Research on student management and educational management emphasizes that the success of character development and achievement requires a planned, participatory, and spiritual value-based approach. Program planning based on annual evaluations and student development needs, character and achievement are placed as integrated goals, not two separate programs, which can be a driving force for the success of character education in schools. (Farizi, 2025)

In line with the research above, other factors that indicate that character education is effective are school leadership and policies outlined in the vision and mission, as well as an explicit character-oriented curriculum. Consistent school rules and culture enable teachers to act as role models, fostering warm communication, and consistent discipline. Exemplary behavior is the most influential factor in daily character formation. A conducive learning environment (a positive classroom climate, emotional support, recognition of student effort, and character-based classroom management) has been shown to suppress negative behavior and encourage prosocial interactions. Another supporting factor is collaboration between parents and the community, such as family and community involvement, which can strengthen the habituation of values outside of school, thus ensuring a more stable impact of character education on student academic achievement. (Nisa, 2025)

Based on several previous studies, it is considered important to examine how a character management framework is designed, implemented, and evaluated to improve student achievement in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools) through a multi-site study at MIN 1 and MIN 2 in Malang City. Character development is seen as a systematic process to instill core values in students until they become habits. Management serves as an instrument to ensure that character development does not stop being an incidental program, but becomes a system that is planned, organized, consistently implemented, and evaluated with measurable instruments.

Madrasah MIN 1 Malang City has the flagship program PAKUBUMI (Development of Morals, Ubudiyah and Islamic Culture), which emphasizes the habit of worship, etiquette and religious culture. Meanwhile, Madrasah MIN 2 Malang City developed the " *Smart, Religious and Fun*" program which is strengthened by Five Character Development (Heart, Brain, Shining Liver, Pancreas, Golden Feet). Both madrasas have a reputation for strong academic and non-academic achievements. From here, it is necessary to carry out an in-depth analysis of how the concept of character education management has been developed and obtain a framework for a character education management model in basic education institutions.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. This design was selected because the study aimed to explore, describe, and interpret how character education management is planned, organized, implemented, and evaluated in two Islamic elementary schools. The multi-site design enabled the researcher to compare practices across two institutions and identify both common patterns and distinctive strategies in managing character education to improve student achievement.

The research was conducted at MIN 1, Malang City, and MIN 2, Malang City. These sites were selected purposively because both madrasahs have established flagship character education programs and have demonstrated consistent academic and non-academic achievements. MIN 1 Malang City implements the PAKUBUMI program, which emphasizes moral development, *ubudiyah*, and Islamic culture, while MIN 2 Malang City develops the Smart, Religious, and Fun program through the Panca Bina character development framework. These institutional characteristics made both madrasahs relevant sites for examining character education management in Islamic elementary education.

The informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The main criteria for selecting informants were their direct involvement in planning, implementing, supervising, or supporting character education programs in the two madrasahs. The informants consisted of school principals, vice principals for curriculum, classroom teachers, homeroom teachers, character mentors, school committee members, parents, and students. In total, 18 key informants participated in the study, consisting of two school principals, four vice principals, eight teachers or homeroom teachers, two school committee members, and two parents.

Data were collected over six months through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to obtain information about school policies, character education planning, teacher roles, parental involvement, implementation strategies, evaluation mechanisms, and perceived impacts on student achievement. Observations were carried out during daily habituation activities, classroom learning, religious activities, excellent-class programs, and extracurricular activities. Document analysis was conducted on the Madrasah Work Plan, Madrasah Activity and Budget Plan, character journals, student achievement reports, school regulations, and character program evaluation documents.

The data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the data condensation stage, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and organized data relevant to character education management and student achievement. In the data display stage, the data were arranged in narrative descriptions, matrices, and cross-site comparisons to identify patterns within and across the two madrasahs. In the verification stage, the researcher interpreted the findings and drew conclusions regarding the management framework of character education in both institutions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study used source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from principals, vice principals, teachers, committee members, parents, and students. Technique triangulation was carried out by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents. This process was used to confirm the consistency, credibility, and validity of the findings before formulating the proposed character education management framework.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 MIN 1 Malang City

In the MIN 1 Malang City flagship class program, the PAKUBUMI model (Development of Morals, *Ubudiyah*, and Islamic Culture) has been used which is planned systematically through: (1) Based on the madrasah's religious vision, (2) Core values: religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, (3) Daily habits are designed in a structured manner, (4) Teachers and homeroom teachers are given clear roles,

and (5) Parents are involved through associations/committees. Next is implementation, which is carried out through three strategies: (1) Habituation: congregational prayer, manners (greetings, smiles), dhuha & dhuhur prayers, (2) Role models: teachers are disciplined, polite, orderly, (3) Learning integration: teachers include values in class activities, (4) Al-Qur'an literacy is strengthened with the Ummi method (tahsin, tartil, tahfidz).

Evaluation is the final phase carried out in the concept of character education management. Madrasas conduct program evaluations through: (1) Daily behavioral observations, (2) Character journals/records, (3) Teacher evaluation meetings, (4) Results used for further development, (5) Implications for achievement, (6) Improved learning discipline, (7) Stable competitive mentality, and (8) Worship habits that form calm and focus. From a series of stages, from planning to evaluation, the program implemented is in accordance with the concept of character education management (Santoso, 2025). The implemented program can have an impact on improving student achievement. Impacts that can be assessed include: (1) improved learning discipline, (2) Stable competitive mentality, (3) Worship habits that form calm and focus, and (5) improved academic and non-academic achievement.

3.2 MIN 2 Malang City

In the discussion for the second location, character education and learning planning for the superior classes are aligned with Gagné's vision-mission orientation and learning domains, through the following stages: (1) learning needs analysis, (2) learning design, (3) implementation of active learning activities, (4) continuous evaluation. This approach is projected as a strategic instrument to strengthen the image of the madrasah.

At the operational level, planning begins with identifying the characteristics, talents, and special needs of high-achieving students, then developing appropriate strategies, models, methods, and materials (Wulandari et al., 2023); this includes establishing SMART learning objectives, developing enrichment and acceleration curricula, and selecting innovative methods (e.g., project-based/inquiry/differentiated learning).

Next, there is the development of an enrichment curriculum. This curriculum is positioned as a key element. The development of the enrichment curriculum is carried out to strengthen the competitiveness of madrasas in science, research, and technology, while adhering to the Independent Curriculum and national madrasah education standards. The difference lies in a more intensive and flexible structure, as well as an orientation towards Olympiads and research. The enrichment program takes place outside regular hours (day/night) to strengthen competency in science, mathematics, and social science Olympiads, encourage scientific research, and support extracurricular activities. The management system is driven by the Deputy Head of Academic Affairs and coordinated with the Advisory Team to ensure better monitoring of the planning, organization, and implementation stages of evaluation.

The Smart, Religious, and Fun Panca Bina Character Program that has been implemented at MIN 2 Malang City begins with the planning stage through: (1). Collaborative design with teachers, (2). The same core values: religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, and (3). Emphasis on a fun learning atmosphere. Next is the implementation stage through Panca Bina, namely: (1). HEART: present on time, remember assignments, 2. BRAIN: giving speeches in front of friends, inviting them to do good, (3) SHINE HEART: cleanliness, health, neatness of the environment, (4). PANCREAS: a stage for artistic & sports creations and (5). GOLDEN FEET: learning books & well-being. All programs are directed to foster students' intrinsic motivation, so that it is hoped that students will have a stronger character, always be enthusiastic and confident, and have a strong spiritual mentality.

At the final stage of character education to improve academic achievement, evaluation is carried out through (1) Behavioral observation, (2) Attitude assessment, and (3) Documentation of character development. In the evaluation that has been carried out, it is hoped that there will be follow-up and implications to improve student achievement. Implications that can be assessed include: (1) Courage to appear increases, (2) Creativity develops, (3) Discipline and responsibility increase, and (4) Academic

& non-academic achievements also increase. In this context, character education in upper grades requires the implementation of planned, organized, and measurable learning management, starting from participant selection, enrichment curriculum design, intensive coaching by professional teachers and trainers, to competitive achievement-based evaluation (Gagne, 1985).

Although each madrasah has a different concept of character education management, it can be emphasized that both institutions have similarities in using strategies to achieve the stated goals. Cross-location analysis found that both institutions have (1) the same spiritual core values to shape students' characters, such as religious, honest, disciplined, and responsible, (2) character formation strategies in the form of role models, habits, reinforcement, (3) evaluation using observation and character journals involving parents. Meanwhile, the fundamental difference between the two institutions in the student character education program is that MIN 1 Malang City focuses on structured Islamic worship and culture, which is reflected through the "PAKUBUMI" program. While MIN 2 Malang City focuses on creativity and a pleasant learning atmosphere, called the "Panca Bina" program.

From the results of the study and analysis obtained, character management that has been implemented in both institutions in a planned, organized, consistent, directed, and evaluated based on evidence will result in strengthening core characters that are proven to be able to continuously improve student achievement both academically and non-academically. This is in line with Robert Gagne's statement, which emphasizes that the effectiveness of learning is determined by how the learning process is organized and controlled systematically through external and internal conditions that support learning outcomes (Gagne, 1985).

The character management program that has been implemented has also produced a character formation model that can later be developed or adopted by other institutions so that the management of student character education is truly in accordance with the objectives and has real implications for improving student achievement.

The MPC Model – Integrated Character Formation Management is implemented through: 1) Management Function (POAC). Planning: Character values and objectives are translated into work programs. Organizing: Division of roles between teachers, homeroom teachers, and committees. Mobilization: Habituation, role models, and reinforcement. Control: Authentic evaluation and follow-up; 2) Lickona Character Dimensions, Knowing, Feeling, and Acting; 3) Evidence-Based Evaluation through: Behavioral observations, character journals, and follow-up meetings; and 4) MPC results can be seen through: Student character is strengthened, academic and non-academic achievements increase, and the religious culture of the madrasah becomes stable.

Conceptually, the management model in character education that has been implemented in elementary madrasahs can be described in the following diagram:

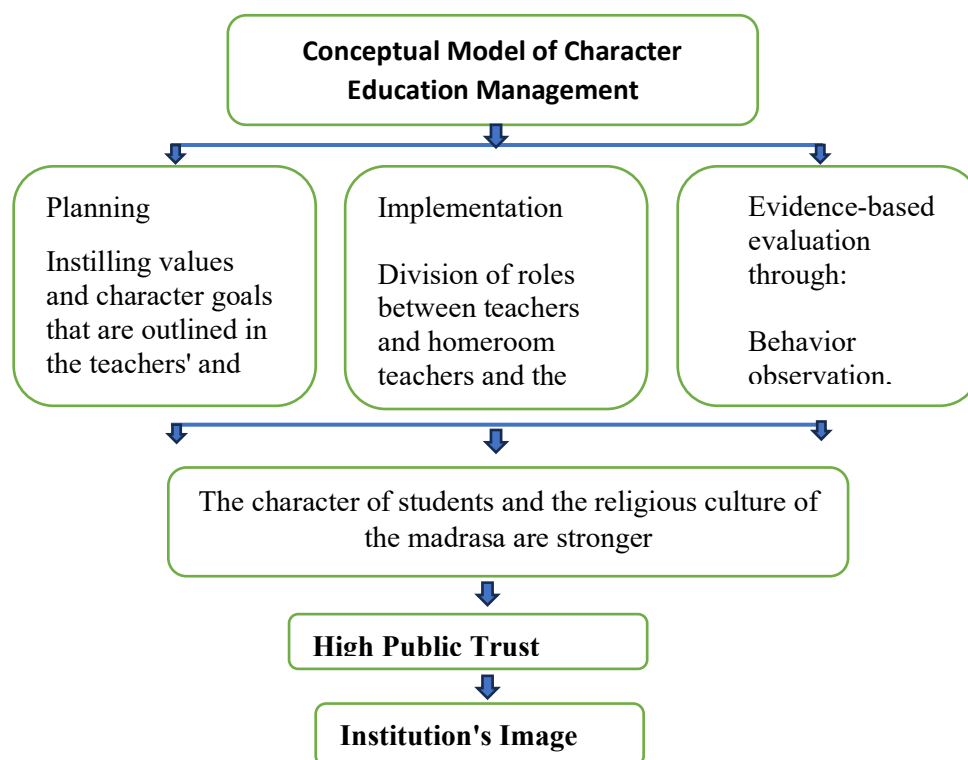


Figure 1. The Management Model of Character Education

The Character-building model is a systematic approach to instilling moral, spiritual, and social values in students through a planned educational process. In the context of madrasah education, this model is very important because good character building will have a direct impact on improving academic achievement. There are three main models that are widely used: role models, habituation, and educational rewards and punishments, each of which is strengthened by the views of figures such as Thomas Lickona, Albert Bandura, Imam Al-Ghazali, KH Achmad Dahlan (Education Figure and Founder of Muhammadiyah), and KH Hasyim Asy'ari (Education Figure and Founder of Nahdlatul Ulama).

The concept of effective character education that has been implemented at MIN 1 and MIN 2 in Malang City aligns with the results of previous studies that: Integration is needed throughout the school system. This means that character values are incorporated into the vision and mission, curriculum, intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities; schools are built as "ethical communities" that consistently display a culture of character (Azmi, 2023). Religious and moral ethos are integrated, especially in Islamic education, so that religious learning is not merely cognitive but also touches on daily attitudes and behaviors (Agung, 2021).

Strong management and governance must have the support of the principal, clear policies, character program planning, and regular evaluation of school culture, teachers, and student character achievements are the keys to effectiveness (Nisa 2026). In line with Nisa 2026's research, Fahrudin stated that Islamic boarding schools and schools with strong character are characterized by management that is able to combine traditional methods (habitual worship, dormitory discipline) with modern innovations (project-based learning, digital literacy) (Fahrudin, 2025). Another factor that is no less important is the central role of teachers as models and managers of habituation. This means that teachers are positioned not only as teachers, but as moral role models and habituation managers: setting examples, reminding, giving sanctions and appreciation, and building routines that instill values (honesty, responsibility, discipline, tolerance) (Dwiyan, 2025).

A comprehensive approach: cognitive-affective-psychomotor is part of the concept of character education, understood as the development of knowledge of values, appreciation (attitudes), and

habituation of moral actions in an integrated manner, in line with the definition of character as a unit of thoughts, feelings, and behavior. From an Islamic educational perspective, the emphasis is also on intellectual integration and moral-spiritual awareness (noble morals) as a solution to moral degradation. The next element involved in character education is school-family-community collaboration (Fadillah, 2025). The involvement of parents and the community is repeatedly mentioned as a key supporting factor; without this synergy, the effectiveness of character education in schools is limited. Overall, the madrasah has attempted to synergize all important elements in managing character education at MIN 1 and MIN 2 Malang City. Thus, its management can be measured and deemed effective because it is in accordance with the principles of character education, which include:

First, exemplary behavior (modeling) plays a fundamental role in character formation. This model aligns with Thomas Lickona's explanation that character education should begin with concrete examples from teachers and adults around students, as moral values such as religiosity, discipline, and social responsibility are more easily understood through concrete behavior than through verbal instruction (Lickona, 1991). Albert Bandura, through his Social Learning Theory, asserts that most human behavior is acquired through the process of imitating (modeling) the behavior of others. In the madrasah context, teachers serve as primary figures whose behavior is observed, imitated, and internalized by students. Furthermore, Muslim scholar Imam Al-Ghazali (2005) places exemplary behavior as the core of moral education. According to him, a teacher must first improve himself before improving others, as morality is more easily learned through concrete examples than verbal advice.

In the context of Islamic education, exemplary behavior was also conveyed by the prominent Islamic scholar KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, who emphasized the importance of a teacher's role. Teachers serve as role models in terms of manners, morals, and spirituality. In his work *Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, he explained that teachers must instill noble morals in students through exemplary manners, sincerity, and obedience to Allah. For KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (1995), character formation will not be successful without *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul). A teacher with a pure soul will provide a spiritual example for his students. Therefore, a role model is not only an outward example, but also an emanation of sincerity and faith within the teacher. He emphasized that knowledge will not be beneficial without good manners towards the teacher and the knowledge itself. "Indeed, knowledge will not be beneficial except for those who are civilized towards their teachers."

Second, the habituation model, which is an effort to instill character values through the practice and repetition of good behavior in daily life. Lickona emphasized that moral values will become part of the personality if they are continuously practiced in madrasah routines such as praying before studying, maintaining cleanliness, and working together. Bandura in Aulia Musfara (2023) also explains that repeated behavior will strengthen a person's cognitive and affective schemas, so that good habits become part of the student's identity. Through consistent habituation, students will be shaped into religious, disciplined, and responsible individuals, which has implications for increasing enthusiasm for learning, work ethic, and optimal academic results.

Third, the reward and punishment model of education in character building is used to reinforce positive behavior and correct negative behavior through education. According to Lickona Theory, rewards and consequences (punishments) in character education should function as moral guidance, not just behavioral control (Susanti, 2022; Rizky, 2021). Bandura (1977) added that positive reinforcement strengthens students' internal motivation to repeat good behavior, while proportional punishment prevents the repetition of undesirable behavior. This statement is in line with the opinion of Imam Al-Ghazali (2023) who views that rewards and punishments in education must be carried out with compassion and wisdom, so as not to cause hatred but to foster moral awareness. Through the application of proportional rewards and punishments, students learn to be responsible for their behavior, thereby increasing their motivation and achievement.

A critical analysis of the PAKUBUMI program at MIN 1 Kota Malang and PANCA BINA at MIN 2 Kota Malang shows that character education in madrasahs is no longer positioned as an additional activity, but has become a managerial system integrated into the institutional culture. Both programs

demonstrate a transformation in the approach to character education from merely normative moral development toward a model of character strengthening that is structured, measurable, and oriented toward improving student achievement. In the context of MIN 1 Kota Malang, the PAKUBUMI program emphasizes a strong religious-cultural approach through habituation of worship, reinforcement of manners, and Islamic culture. This model shows that the madrasah strives to build student character through continuous internalization of spiritual values. Strategies such as duha prayer, greeting practices, Tahsin, and Tahfidz of the Qur'an using the Ummi method indicate that character formation is carried out through consistent habituation.

This approach is in line with Al-Ghazali's (Al-Ghozali, 2023) habituation theory which emphasizes that morals can be shaped through repeated practice until they become a permanent habit in students. However, an approach that is highly oriented toward religiosity has the potential to create an overly formalistic educational pattern if it is not balanced with the development of students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. In the context of 21st-century education, religious character needs to be integrated with adaptive competencies so that students are not only normatively obedient but also able to face social challenges and technological developments in a critical and innovative manner.

Cross-site analysis shows that both madrasahs have the same character orientation, namely religious, honest, disciplined, and responsible, but use different strategies. MIN 1 emphasizes the stability of religious culture and habituation of worship, whereas MIN 2 highlights creativity and the development of students' potential through a humanistic approach. This difference indicates that character education management is effective, contextual, and influenced by the institutional vision of each madrasah. From the perspective of Islamic education management, the two models actually complement each other. PAKUBUMI excels in strengthening Islamic cultural spirituality, while PANCA BINA excels in developing students' soft skills and social competence. Character education is not only determined by the number of programs, but also by the consistency of implementation, teachers' role models, parental involvement, as well as the madrasah's ability to integrate religious values with future competency needs.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that effective Islamic education management at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah (MI) level is achieved through a systematic management cycle of planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation, as reflected in the PAKUBUMI program at MIN 1 Malang and the Panca Bina program at MIN 2 Malang. Both programs successfully strengthen students' character and contribute to improved academic and non-academic achievement. Furthermore, the proposed Management of Positive Character (MPC) model provides a comprehensive framework for character education management, highlighting management commitment, religious culture, and strong collaboration with parents and the wider community as essential factors for successful implementation. These findings contribute theoretically by reinforcing the integration of character education within Islamic educational management and practically by supporting the inclusion of measurable character development programs in madrasah planning documents (RKM/RKAM). However, this study is limited to two state madrasahs in Malang City, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings across different educational contexts and levels. Future research is therefore recommended to examine the applicability and effectiveness of the MPC model in diverse madrasah settings, including private institutions and secondary education, while employing broader samples and longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to evaluate its long-term impact on students' character development and educational outcomes.

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