



The Role of Character Education in Building Noble Morals in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (A Case Study of Implementation in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, Mandailing Natal Regency)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the implementation of character education in building noble morals among Grade VIII students at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin in Mandailing Natal Regency. The research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method, where data is collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research subjects include students, teachers, the head of the madrasah, and parents. The findings reveal that character education at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin is integrated into daily learning through teacher role models, extracurricular activities such as scouting and spiritual studies, and parental involvement in supporting school programs. Teachers play a significant role in instilling moral values, while extracurricular activities provide a space for students to practice these values outside the classroom. The study also identifies challenges, such as external environmental influences, particularly social media, which may hinder students' internalization of character values. Additionally, limitations in time and resources pose obstacles to the optimal implementation of character education. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of stronger collaboration between schools, parents, and the community to reinforce character education. Continuous evaluation and innovation are also necessary to address technological challenges, ensuring character education remains relevant and effective in shaping a morally upright generation.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is a crucial element in nurturing a generation with noble morals and strong ethics. Its purpose goes beyond providing students with academic knowledge and skills; it also instills ethical and moral values that shape positive behavior in daily life. As modern societal challenges grow

increasingly complex, character education becomes more relevant, particularly in Islamic educational institutions like Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs). As an institution that emphasizes religious education, Madrasah Tsanawiyah plays a strategic role in instilling noble morals in students from an early age (Wibowo, 2012).

Character education in Madrasah Tsanawiyah encompasses not only religious values but also universal values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and empathy. This aligns with the national education goals that emphasize shaping Indonesian citizens who are faithful, pious, and virtuous (National Education System Law, 2003). In the Islamic education context, character education integrates with religious teachings that guide students to become individuals with both intellectual capability and high moral integrity (Lickona, 1991).

Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Umar Bin Khattab in Mandailing Natal Regency is committed to implementing character education. This school acknowledges the growing challenges in fostering students' noble morals, especially amidst the fast-paced developments in globalization and technology. Negative influences, such as hedonism, individualism, and materialism, can easily affect student behavior, making it essential to strengthen character education to mitigate these adverse effects (Nurhadi, 2016).

In Grade VIII at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al Umar Bin Khattab, character education is applied through a holistic approach encompassing classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and spiritual guidance. Character education integrates into various subjects, especially Islamic studies, highlighting noble morals as a primary goal of Islamic education. However, its application extends beyond religious studies, embedding character values into all school activities (Muhammad, 2017).

This case study specifically examines character education implementation in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin. Grade VIII was chosen because students at this age are in a transitional phase to adolescence, making them highly susceptible to external influences. Effective character education at this stage can shape positive behavior and morals that will benefit students in the future. Research suggests that adolescence is a critical period in character formation, and appropriate intervention can help students navigate this phase better (Santrock, 2010).

Character education at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin employs various methods, from values-based learning and moral development through teacher role models to activities encouraging positive behavior, such as mentoring programs and spiritual guidance. This approach aligns with character

education models emphasizing the importance of a supportive and consistent educational environment in fostering positive values (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Moreover, the character education program at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin benefits from a solid partnership between the school and parents. Parental involvement is crucial in character education, as moral formation occurs not only at school but also at home. Through this collaboration, the school and parents create a conducive environment for character development, ensuring that values taught at school continue at home (Hasanah, 2019).

However, implementing character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah faces various challenges. One of the biggest challenges is ensuring that the values taught are genuinely internalized by students. It is not uncommon for students to understand these values cognitively yet fail to apply them in daily life. Therefore, in-depth evaluations of character education effectiveness are essential, along with innovative strategies to ensure these values truly become part of students' personalities (Muslich, 2011).

This study aims to explore in greater depth how character education is implemented in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, Mandailing Natal Regency, and to identify factors influencing the success or failure of this program. This case study hopes to provide valuable recommendations for developing character education in madrasahs at both local and national levels (Tilaar, 2004).

Thus, this research holds significant relevance in Indonesia's educational context, particularly in efforts to shape a generation with noble morals, ready to face global challenges while firmly upholding moral values. Effective character education will not only mold ethical individuals but will also positively contribute to society as a whole (Gunawan, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODE

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of character education in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, Mandailing Natal Regency. This approach was chosen because qualitative research allows for a detailed exploration of experiences, perceptions, and interactions within the context of character education (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design

The research design employed is a descriptive case study, aimed at providing a detailed picture of how character education is implemented in Grade VIII and identifying factors that influence the effectiveness of its implementation. The study focuses on a single location, MTs Darul Hadist

Hutabaringin, to gain a comprehensive understanding of character education practices there.

Research Subjects

The research subjects consist of several elements directly involved in the character education process in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin:

- a. Grade VIII Students: The direct recipients of the character education program.
- b. Teachers: Especially religious studies teachers, who play a central role in shaping students' morals.
- c. Head of Madrasah: Holds a key role in guiding character education policy at the school.
- d. Parents/Guardians: To provide insights on the continuity of character education at home. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling, choosing individuals with relevant knowledge and involvement in character education implementation at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin (Sugiyono, 2017).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was conducted using several methods to ensure the validity and richness of data:

- a. Participant Observation: The researcher observed classroom activities in Grade VIII, as well as extracurricular and spiritual activities related to character education. Observation was participatory, with the researcher directly observing classroom situations and interactions between teachers and students to understand how character values are internalized in daily activities (Patton, 2002).
- b. In-Depth Interviews: Conducted with teachers, the head of the madrasah, students, and parents to explore their views, perceptions, and experiences with character education. The interviews were semi-structured to maintain flexibility while focusing on relevant topics (Kvale, 1996).
- c. Documentation: The researcher collected related documents such as lesson plans, the madrasah's work programs, character education guidelines, and student activity records. This documentation complemented data from observations and interviews and provided concrete evidence of character education implementation in the madrasah.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved:

- a. **Data Reduction:** Data from various sources was reduced or selected based on the research focus, which is character education implementation. Irrelevant or less supportive data were excluded (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- b. **Data Presentation:** Following data reduction, data was presented descriptively in thematic narratives on character education implementation at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin. This presentation categorized key aspects such as methods used, teacher roles, student involvement, and challenges faced.
- c. **Drawing Conclusions:** The final step was drawing conclusions from the data analysis results. These conclusions are based on findings that emerged during the research and are connected to relevant theories on character education and the Islamic education context at madrasahs. The researcher will verify conclusions by testing data validity through source triangulation (Creswell, 2014).

Data Validity

To ensure data validity, the researcher used triangulation by comparing data from various sources (teachers, students, parents), various data collection techniques (observation, interviews, documentation), and checking data consistency over time. This process was done to ensure the research results are credible and accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

This study aims to understand the implementation of character education in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, Mandailing Natal Regency. Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, the following key findings were obtained:

Implementation of Character Education in Grade VIII

The findings indicate that character education in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin has been integrated into various learning activities and extracurricular programs. Subject teachers, particularly Islamic studies teachers, play a central role in instilling character values through classroom teaching. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and cooperation are consistently emphasized in each learning session, both through formal content and extracurricular activities.

Teachers often begin lessons by exemplifying positive behavior and moral teachings, followed by group discussions on the importance of these values in daily life. For instance, in Fiqh lessons, students learn about honesty in worship

and social interactions, while in Islamic history, students study the exemplary characters of Prophets and influential Islamic figures.

The Role of Teachers in Implementing Character Education

Interviews with Grade VIII teachers revealed that they play a significant role in creating a conducive environment for character education. They use role modeling as the main method, where teachers strive to be good examples for students in all aspects of life, both in and outside school.

Teachers also integrate character education into non-religious subjects such as Indonesian Language and Mathematics. In Indonesian Language, for example, students are taught values of tolerance and empathy through stories or texts with moral messages. Teachers use discussions to encourage students to express their opinions honestly and responsibly.

However, some teachers noted challenges in balancing academic curriculum demands with character education. A dense curriculum sometimes limits the time allocated for character education, requiring teachers to find ways to integrate values without compromising academic achievement.

Students' Perceptions of Character Education

Interviews with Grade VIII students showed that most students perceive direct benefits from character education at the madrasah. They feel that the values taught at school help them face daily challenges, both at home and in social environments. For instance, students reported that character education has made them more aware of the importance of respect, cooperation with peers, and honesty in completing tasks.

However, some students admitted that applying these values outside school can be challenging, especially when influenced by peers who lack similar educational experiences. Nevertheless, students feel that the character education they receive at the madrasah has given them a solid foundation for positive and responsible behavior.

The Role of Parents in Supporting Character Education

Parents play a crucial role in supporting character education at home. Interviews with several parents indicated that they generally support the character education program at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin. Most parents reported that they try to instill similar values at home, such as discipline and responsibility.

However, some parents face difficulties in implementing character education at home due to time constraints or social challenges in their communities. Despite these challenges, they hope the school continues to be an effective place for their children's character development.

Extracurricular Activities and Character Development

In addition to classroom instruction, MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin organizes various extracurricular activities to support character education. Activities such as scouting, spiritual mentoring, and Islamic studies are routinely conducted to foster students' morals. These activities are designed to nurture values such as leadership, cooperation, discipline, and independence.

Observations of scouting activities showed that students are trained to work together in teams, solve problems collectively, and take responsibility for their tasks. Students involved in these activities tend to demonstrate more disciplined and responsible behavior compared to those less active in extracurriculars.

Challenges in Implementing Character Education

Despite the success of character education programs at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, several challenges arise in their implementation. One major challenge is the influence of external environments, especially the negative effects of social media and peer interactions outside school. Teachers and parents acknowledge that, while character values are taught at school, students are often exposed to content or behaviors outside that contradict these values.

Additionally, limitations in resources and time present another challenge. Some teachers expressed that they do not always have enough time to focus on character education due to high academic demands. Furthermore, resources such as structured character education books and modules are still limited in the madrasah.

Evaluation of Character Education Effectiveness

Overall, the findings suggest that character education at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin is quite effective in shaping students' noble morals, particularly within the school environment. However, this effectiveness tends to diminish when students interact outside school. Thus, a more holistic approach involving greater parental and community participation is needed.

Internally, the school's character education program has successfully instilled fundamental values such as discipline, honesty, and responsibility. However, further reinforcement is needed to ensure consistent implementation of character education across all subjects and to develop strategies to address external challenges such as social and media influences.

Discussion of Research Findings

Implementation of Character Education in Grade VIII

The implementation of character education in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin has shown promising progress, particularly in integrating character values into various subjects. This aligns with character education

theory, which emphasizes that moral values should be an integral part of the school curriculum (Lickona, 1991). By teaching values such as honesty, responsibility, and cooperation, teachers not only provide knowledge but also shape students' character in their daily lives.

Character values taught across subjects, especially in Islamic studies, are highly relevant in the context of a madrasah. According to Wibowo (2012), Islamic education serves as a fundamental pillar in building noble morals, forming a significant part of character education. Integrating these values into learning helps students develop cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally in ways that align with moral conduct.

Character education within religious schools has the advantage of incorporating spiritual and moral values directly into students' lives. For example, students practice honesty in worship, not only as a formal rule but as a deeply held belief. This aligns with character education principles, which emphasize the importance of integrating theory and practice in character formation (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

However, the consistency of character education implementation presents a challenge. Some teachers feel that the packed curriculum limits their ability to allocate sufficient time for character education, reinforcing previous findings that limited time is a key obstacle in character education (Muslich, 2011). Therefore, further innovation is needed to seamlessly blend character values into daily learning without compromising academic objectives.

In this context, it is essential for the school to continuously refine character education strategies in a flexible yet effective way. Teachers can adopt a cross-curricular approach, embedding character education across subjects so students apply these values in every learning activity, often subconsciously.

The Role of Teachers in Character Education Implementation

The role of teachers as facilitators in character education is crucial. Teachers are not just educators delivering academic material but also role models who shape students' character through their everyday attitudes and behaviors (Lickona, 1991). At MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, teachers use role modeling as a primary method to instill character values. This aligns with the concept of role modeling, where students more readily absorb moral values by observing and imitating teachers' behaviors (Bandura, 1977).

Teacher role modeling is essential because students often see teachers as authority figures and role models. Teachers who exhibit honesty, fairness, and responsibility influence students to emulate these behaviors. Research by Berkowitz and Bier (2005) suggests that adult role models, particularly teachers, significantly impact students' internalization of character values. Therefore,

successful character education in schools must start with teachers who exemplify good moral behavior.

In addition to role modeling, teachers employ other methods such as discussions and reflection. Discussing moral values through case studies or stories encourages students to think critically about the ethical implications of their actions. This discussion method can deepen students' understanding of the importance of moral values in their lives. According to Kirschenbaum (1995), discussions involving critical thinking and moral reflection help students develop a deeper comprehension of morality.

However, teachers face challenges in balancing character education with academic demands. A dense curriculum often limits opportunities for in-depth discussions about character values. This indicates that while teachers' roles are vital, school support is necessary to ensure character education is not overlooked due to academic pressure. Support may include additional training for teachers on how to integrate character values effectively into their subjects (Muslich, 2011).

Strengthening the role of teachers in character education must be accompanied by supportive school policies, such as reducing curriculum overload or developing more systematic character education programs. This way, teachers can focus not only on academic achievement but also on fostering strong character in students.

Students' Perceptions of Character Education

Students' perceptions of character education at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin are mostly positive. They feel that the character values taught at school help them in their daily lives. According to Lickona (1991), students' positive perceptions of character education indicate the program's success. Students who feel engaged and benefit from character education are more motivated to internalize the values taught.

However, the study also reveals that some students find it challenging to apply character values outside school, possibly due to social influences outside the school environment, such as interactions with peers who have not received similar character education. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), social and cultural environments significantly impact a child's character development. Negative influences from the external environment can weaken the character values taught at school, especially if there is insufficient support from parents and the community.

This difficulty suggests that character education cannot rely solely on school programs; it must be supported by all environments in which students interact. In this study, some students expressed that it is easier for them to

adhere to taught values at school but challenging to do so in less supportive external environments. This highlights the importance of a holistic character education approach, involving parents, the community, and media as external factors influencing a child's character.

Additionally, students involved in extracurricular activities tend to have a more positive perception of character education. Activities like scouting and spiritual studies provide opportunities for students to practice values like cooperation, discipline, and responsibility in broader contexts. This aligns with research indicating that extracurricular activities can effectively develop students' character (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

To overcome challenges in implementing character education outside school, greater parental and community involvement is necessary. With support from outside environments, students can continue practicing the character values taught at school in their daily lives. Therefore, character education should be seen as a collective effort involving all parties who play a role in a child's development.

The Role of Parents in Supporting Character Education

The role of parents in character education is vital as they are the first agents shaping a child's character before the child enters the school environment. In this study, most parents support the character education program at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin and strive to reinforce these values at home. This aligns with moral education theory, which asserts that character education should begin within the family environment (Nucci, 2001).

However, some parents face challenges, such as limited time and external social influences that may interfere with implementing character education. Some parents feel they do not always have full control over what their children experience outside the home, particularly due to peer influence and media. This suggests that the family cannot solely shape a child's character; instead, strong collaboration between school and family is necessary (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Research by Santrock (2010) shows that interaction between school and family is crucial in supporting a child's character development. When parents reinforce values taught at school, children are more likely to consistently apply these values. Therefore, an effective character education program should include parental involvement in every stage of the character education process.

In this context, MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin has attempted to involve parents through regular communication and programs that encourage parental participation in school activities. However, this study also indicates that a more systematic approach is needed to ensure that character values taught at school are continued at home. One way to achieve this is by providing training

programs for parents on how to support their children's character education at home (Hasanah, 2019).

In conclusion, strengthening character education requires a stronger synergy between school and family. Parents should not only participate in school activities but also be equipped with the right tools and resources to continue character education at home. This will ensure that children receive consistent character education at both school and home.

Extracurricular Activities and Moral Development

Extracurricular activities at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin, such as scouting and spiritual studies, play an important role in students' moral development. These activities provide students with opportunities to practice the character values they learn in class in a more practical setting. According to Eccles and Barber (1999), participation in extracurricular activities can enhance students' social and moral skills, as well as foster a sense of responsibility and leadership.

In scouting, for example, students are trained to work in groups, solve problems collectively, and demonstrate discipline and responsibility. This aligns with the goals of character education, which aims to equip students with the skills to thrive in a complex, multicultural society. Participation in scouting also improves leadership and teamwork skills, which are essential components of character education (Lickona, 1991).

Beyond scouting, spiritual study sessions also play a significant role in nurturing students' morals. These sessions allow students to deepen their understanding of Islamic spiritual and moral values. According to Nurhadi (2016), moral development cannot be separated from religious education, particularly in a madrasah setting. By deepening their understanding of religious teachings, students can more easily understand and apply moral values in their daily lives.

However, not all students participate in extracurricular activities, so the benefits of character education from these activities are not felt equally by all. This study shows that students involved in extracurricular activities tend to exhibit more positive behavior than those who do not participate. Therefore, it is essential for the school to encourage wider participation in extracurricular activities as part of the character education program (Gunawan, 2012).

The school should also develop a variety of extracurricular activities that appeal to students with diverse interests. By offering more options, students can find activities that align with their interests while benefiting from the character education embedded in those activities. In this way, extracurricular

activities can be an effective tool for strengthening character education in schools.

Challenges in Implementing Character Education

The main challenge in implementing character education at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin is the influence of external environments, especially social media and peer interactions outside school. Negative influences from these external environments often hinder the school's efforts to instill positive character values. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development (1979), which states that a child's character development is influenced by multiple environmental layers, including family, school, peers, and media.

Social media, in particular, poses a significant challenge for character education. Research by Anderson and Jiang (2018) indicates that social media can influence adolescent behavior in both positive and negative ways. On one hand, social media can be a tool for sharing moral and ethical messages, but on the other, the negative content prevalent on social media can undermine the values taught at school. In this study, students expressed difficulty applying character values when exposed to negative content on social media.

Another challenge is the limited time and resources available at the school. Teachers often feel burdened by a demanding curriculum, which restricts the time allocated to character education. This suggests that better planning is needed to integrate character education into the school curriculum (Muslich, 2011). The school should find ways to merge character education with academic subjects so that it is seen not as an addition but as an integral part of learning.

Resource constraints also limit the effective implementation of character education programs. Some teachers expressed the need for more materials and specific guidance on how to teach character values effectively. Therefore, the school should provide adequate support for teachers in the form of training and relevant resources to bolster character education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

To overcome these challenges, a more comprehensive approach to character education is needed. Schools should collaborate with families, communities, and media to create an environment that supports children's character development. Additionally, character education programs should be designed to integrate seamlessly into all aspects of school learning.

Evaluation of Character Education Effectiveness

This study shows that character education at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin has been fairly effective in fostering students' noble morals, especially within the school environment. However, this effectiveness tends to decrease when students are outside the school, where social and media

influences are stronger. According to Lickona (1991), effective character education should encompass all aspects of students' lives, both at school and beyond. Therefore, evaluating character education should include how students apply these values in different life contexts.

The study also indicates that consistency is a key factor in successful character education. A character education program that is consistent and supported by all stakeholders (teachers, parents, and the community) is more effective in shaping students' character. Conversely, programs that lack consistency or external support struggle to achieve their goals (Nucci, 2001).

In this evaluation, it is important to consider the assessment methods used for character education. Students who display positive behavior at school do not necessarily apply the same values outside school. Therefore, the school should develop an evaluation system that encompasses not only cognitive aspects but also affective and behavioral aspects of students. Qualitative assessments through observations, interviews, and group discussions can be effective methods for evaluating students' character development holistically (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Additionally, this study shows that character education must be continuously evaluated and updated to keep pace with societal changes. The growing influence of technology and social media requires new strategies in character education. Schools must continuously innovate and find ways to incorporate technology positively in character education programs, for example, by using social media platforms to spread moral messages and positive values.

Thus, ongoing evaluation is essential to ensure that character education programs can adapt to changing social and technological environments. Schools must continually review and update their character education programs to remain relevant and effective in shaping students' noble morals in the present and future.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that character education in Grade VIII at MTs Darul Hadist Hutabaringin has been effectively implemented, particularly through the roles of teachers, extracurricular activities, and parental involvement. Teachers act as role models and primary facilitators in instilling character values, such as honesty, responsibility, and discipline, integrated into daily learning. Extracurricular activities, like scouting and spiritual studies, also play a significant role in providing students with opportunities to practice moral values outside the classroom. However,

challenges remain, particularly in the consistent application of these values beyond the school environment, where negative influences from social and social media environments remain strong.

To ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the character education program, stronger synergy is needed between the school, family, and community. Support from parents at home and active participation in school activities can reinforce students' internalization of character values. Additionally, continuous evaluation and innovation in character education programs, especially in addressing challenges from technology and social media, must be developed to keep the program relevant and effective in shaping a morally upright generation.

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