The Dormitory as a Moral Laboratory: Leadership Strategies for Boarding-Based Moral Development in Indonesian Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

Dormitory-based madrasahs in Indonesia constitute distinctive moral ecosystems wherein leadership, spirituality, and education intersect. This study investigates how school principals reconceptualize dormitories as "moral laboratories," fostering the development of ethical reasoning and communal integrity among students. Utilizing a qualitative multiple-case study methodology, the research encompassed three state Islamic boarding schools in South Kalimantan. Data collection comprised 27 in-depth interviews with principals, dormitory teachers, and student leaders; 45 hours of non-participant observation; and comprehensive analysis of institutional documents pertaining to dormitory governance. Triangulation of methods facilitated the identification of salient leadership patterns instrumental in shaping moral development within residential settings. The findings demonstrate that effective leadership entails the integration of spiritual routines, restorative disciplinary practices, and peer mentoring into the dormitory milieu. Morning Qur'an recitations, reflective sessions (muhasabah, i.e., self-examination), and student-led ethics committees operate synergistically as mechanisms of internalized moral accountability. Principals eschew coercive enforcement in favor of participatory, empathetic supervision grounded in Islamic ethical principles (ta'dib). Consequently, the dormitory functions as a moral microcosm where discipline is cultivated through reflective practice, collaboration, and shared responsibility. This study advances scholarly discourse on faith-based moral education by positioning Indonesian madrasahs as exemplars of holistic character formation, characterized by the integration of devotion, reflection, and distributed moral leadership.

Keywords: Character development, Dormitory education, Indonesian madrasah, Islamic boarding school, Leadership, Moral formation.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the erosion of youth character and moral behavior has become a pressing concern in education. Reports from UNESCO and UNICEF highlight that moral degradation, cyberbullying, school violence, and drug abuse among adolescents continue to rise across nations (Putra & Dendup, 2022; Tabroni, 2023). In 2023, UNESCO recorded that nearly one in three students worldwide had experienced bullying or violence at school. Similarly, the World Health Organization estimated that 22% of adolescents were engaged in risky behaviors, including substance use and digital addiction (de la Torre-Luque et al., 2021). These patterns reveal that conventional schooling, which focuses primarily on academic achievement, often fails to provide adequate character and moral education.

In Indonesia, similar challenges persist. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission recorded 2,538 cases of violence and bullying in educational settings between 2020 and 2023, while the National Narcotics Board reported that approximately 1.95 million students had experimented with or used illegal drugs (Noboru et al., 2021). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology received more than 1,700 formal complaints related to sexual harassment and violence in schools. These alarming statistics indicate that moral and behavioral issues among adolescents remain a systemic problem that cannot be resolved solely through classroom-based instruction (Bowes et al., 2019). Schools need structured systems that integrate academic learning with moral formation, daily discipline, and social responsibility.

Conventional schools face limitations in fostering holistic character development. Students typically spend only limited hours in school and are often beyond educators' supervision once they return home. Family involvement also varies depending on socioeconomic background, resulting in inconsistent value transmission. Consequently, moral education is often fragmented and unsustainable. Character education requires continuous modeling, habituation, and supervision—elements that are more effectively realized in a boarding school environment (Alannasir, 2020; Dewy et al., 2022).

Boarding schools, or dormitory-based education systems, provide an immersive environment where students live, learn, and interact within a community governed by shared values. Through structured routines, mentoring, and community life, students internalize values such as discipline, independence, cooperation, empathy, and spirituality. This environment supports character formation not only cognitively but behaviorally and emotionally as well. A study by Beranda emphasized that dormitory-based education can effectively mitigate common adolescent problems such as bullying, juvenile delinquency, and substance abuse (Brenda J. Child, 2018; Muazza et al., 2018).

International experiences demonstrate that the boarding school model remains relevant for character formation. In Japan, the Gakkō no Dōtoku moral education framework integrates ethical and social learning within dormitory life, resulting in measurable improvements in students' empathy and cooperation (Bamkin, 2018). In the United Kingdom, the Boarding Schools' Association (BSA) reported that 66% of boarding students show higher levels of discipline and self-regulation compared to non-boarding peers (Liang, 2023). Likewise, in Malaysia, the Ministry of Education found that 78% of students in residential schools exhibited improved social responsibility and academic consistency (Zhu et al., 2021). These findings confirm that the boarding system, when properly managed, can become an effective ecosystem for nurturing moral integrity and lifelong learning habits.

In Indonesia, the boarding-based education system has grown significantly, particularly in Islamic senior high schools (madrasah aliyah). According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are approximately 1,230 Islamic senior high schools implementing dormitory-based systems (Dewy et al., 2022). This model aligns with the government's vision of holistic education as stipulated in Presidential Instruction No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education (Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter). The policy mandates that character formation must be an integral part of the national education framework, emphasizing religious, ethical, and civic values (Alannasir, 2020). Moreover, specific regulations by the Ministry of Religious Affairs concerning the management of Islamic boarding schools provide guidance to ensure that dormitory governance reflects Islamic principles and effective educational management (Islamic et al., 2024; Musaddad, 2023).

However, the success of boarding-based character education depends largely on its management system. As Behaghel et al. describe, effective educational management encompasses strategic planning, resource organization, inspirational leadership, and evaluation-based supervision (Behaghel et al., 2017). In the boarding context, these processes are more complex because they involve the management of students' daily lives, including academic, social, and spiritual dimensions. The principal's leadership plays a decisive role in creating a vision, fostering an academic and moral culture, and embedding character values into institutional policies. Indawati et al. further argues that the effectiveness of character education depends on the alignment between vision, mission, and the implementation of strategies across formal and non-formal settings (Indawati et al., 2022).

Despite its potential, several challenges remain in implementing boarding-based character education in Indonesia (Azhari et al., 2023). First, many schools face a shortage of educators with specific competencies in character mentoring and counseling. Second, dormitory social dynamics often lead to student fatigue, adjustment difficulties, and peer conflicts. Third, most institutions lack systematic evaluation tools for measuring the success of character programs. Finally, limited parental involvement—due to reduced family interaction—can weaken the continuity of moral guidance outside the dormitory environment (Li et al., 2023; Liang, 2023; Reynolds, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires not only structural reforms but also effective leadership and management strategies that empower teachers and foster a culture of continuous quality improvement(Sugihartati & Susilo, 2019).

From a policy perspective, Indonesia's renewed focus on character education coincides with global educational trends emphasizing values-based and sustainable learning. UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development framework underscores that moral education and sustainability must be integrated into school culture, not taught

as separate subjects (Dahl & Killen, 2018; Hamlin, 2013). Boarding schools, with their controlled environments and 24-hour learning ecosystem, are uniquely positioned to implement such integration effectively. They can cultivate students' sense of responsibility toward themselves, society, and the environment through consistent modeling and community engagement (Behaghel et al., 2017; Brenda J. Child, 2018).

Empirical evidence from Indonesia also illustrates variations in how boarding-based character education is managed across different contexts. For instance, MAPK MAN 4 Banjar focuses on developing future religious scholars (kader ulama) through strong Islamic learning and daily worship practices. MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut integrates science and religion through a research-based curriculum, promoting intellectual rigor alongside moral integrity. Meanwhile, MAN 2 Banjarmasin emphasizes practical skills and disciplinary routines as part of its character education program. These diverse models provide valuable insights into the dynamics of management, leadership, and character formation within Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools.

Given the increasing social challenges facing Indonesian youth and the growing demand for moral education (Susilo & Sugihartati, 2021), understanding how boarding-based character education is managed becomes crucial. There remains a research gap in analyzing comparative management practices among different Islamic senior high schools, particularly in how leadership, character-building strategies, and quality assurance mechanisms interact to produce effective outcomes. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the management of boarding-based character education across multiple sites, focusing on leadership strategies, teacher roles, and quality assurance processes. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on educational management and character formation, providing both theoretical insights and practical implications for policymakers, school leaders, and educators aiming to strengthen character education in Indonesia.

Given the increasing urgency to strengthen students' moral and behavioral development within Islamic educational contexts, effective management and leadership strategies are indispensable in ensuring the success of character education in boarding-based madrasahs. Previous studies have emphasized the role of principals and teachers as key agents in shaping students' moral culture and daily discipline (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020; Arifin, 2022; Dewy et al., 2022; Roqib, 2021). However, limited empirical research has explored how leadership practices is specifically implemented within state Islamic boarding schools in South Kalimantan, particularly in the context of the MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin. To address this gap, the present study seeks to investigate the dynamics of leadership in managing boarding-based character education across these three institutions. Accordingly, the research is guided by the question what are the principal's leadership strategies in developing boarding-based character education at MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan Province?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multi-site case study design aimed at exploring the management of boarding-based character education in three Islamic senior high schools (madrasahs) in South Kalimantan Province, namely MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin. The qualitative approach was selected because it aligns with the purpose of the research—to describe and analyze leadership strategies and character education practices within the boarding school context. According to Creswell, qualitative research enables researchers to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This design was appropriate because the study seeks to uncover complex phenomena related to educational management, leadership behavior, and moral formation within the daily routines of students and educators in Islamic boarding environments.

The study adopted a post-positivist paradigm, which recognizes that human behavior and social reality cannot be understood in absolute terms. As Creswell notes, post-positivism allows researchers to examine observable phenomena while acknowledging the influence of subjective interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this context, the researcher sought to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of principals, vice principals, teachers, and dormitory supervisors in implementing character education through both formal and non-formal programs in madrasahs. Furthermore, a multi-site case study approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive and comparative understanding of character education management across different institutional contexts. This approach allows the researcher to identify patterns, similarities, and unique practices that emerge in each madrasah, offering rich, contextualized insights into leadership strategies in boarding-based education systems.

RESEARCH SETTING

The study was conducted in three Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri) located in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. Each school was purposefully selected because it represents a distinctive model of boarding-based character education under the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

1. MAPK MAN 4 Banjar – an Islamic senior high school with a long tradition of integrating religious and academic excellence through its *Madrasah Aliyah Program Keagamaan (MAPK)*. The institution emphasizes Islamic leadership, discipline, and moral character within a structured dormitory environment.
2. MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut – a state boarding madrasah that combines science, technology, and religious education, focusing on developing intellectually competent and spiritually grounded students. It is part of the national network of *Insan Cendekia* schools managed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.
3. MAN 2 Banjarmasin – a leading Islamic senior high school in the city of Banjarmasin that implements a partial boarding system for selected students, emphasizing academic achievement, moral integrity, and civic responsibility.

These three schools were selected to represent different organizational contexts and management styles in implementing character education, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of the findings through cross-site comparison (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). Data collection was conducted on-site from classroom observations, dormitory activities, and administrative management processes between 2023 and 2024.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Participants in this study were selected purposively, based on their relevance and contribution to the research focus. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants possessed sufficient knowledge, experience, and involvement in the management and implementation of character education programs (Sugiyono, 2017). The key informants (*key participants*) included:

1. Principals (Madrasah Heads) – to provide comprehensive insights into planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the character education programs within the boarding system.
2. Vice Principals for Dormitory Affairs – responsible for managing student life outside formal classes, including moral guidance, discipline, and daily routines in the dormitory.
3. Vice Principals for Curriculum Affairs – to explain how character education is integrated into formal learning activities and aligned with the national curriculum framework.
4. Vice Principals for Student Affairs – to describe student development programs, extracurricular activities, and moral supervision implemented in collaboration with teachers and dormitory staff.
5. Dormitory Supervisors (Pembina Asrama) – to provide detailed information on the character-building practices, behavioral monitoring, and daily mentoring activities conducted within dormitory life.
6. Teachers (Dewan Guru) – to describe their roles in supporting character education through teaching practices, role modeling, and extracurricular engagement.

Altogether, 18 key participants (six from each madrasah) were involved in in-depth interviews and field observations. All participants provided informed consent before data collection, ensuring ethical compliance and confidentiality in accordance with qualitative research standards (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Table 1. Research Matrix.

No	Research Focus / Data	Sub-Indicators	Data Collection Techniques	Informants
1	Leadership Strategies of Madrasah Principals in Developing Boarding-Based Character Education	a. Planning (Plan) b. Implementation (Do) c. Evaluation and Reflection (Study) d. Follow-up and Improvement (Act)	Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis	Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, and Teachers
3	Character Formation Strategies for Boarding Students	a. Sincerity (Ikhlas) – performing activities with pure intention to seek Allah's blessings, not for praise or reward b. Simplicity (Kesederhanaan) – practicing modest living according to needs and avoiding excess c. Independence (Kemandirian) – developing self-reliance and responsibility in daily life d. Islamic Brotherhood (Ukhuwah Islamiyah) – promoting mutual respect, affection, and solidarity among peers	Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis	Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, and Teachers

		e. Freedom (Kebebasan) – fostering independent thinking and expression aligned with Islamic values		
4	Quality Assurance Strategies in Boarding-Based Character Education at MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin	a. Internal quality planning b. Implementation monitoring c. Evaluation and feedback d. Continuous improvement mechanisms	Interviews, Observations, and Document Analysis	Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for Student Affairs, and Teachers

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Single-Site Analysis

Data analysis in this qualitative study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which involves three concurrent and iterative processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Data were analyzed continuously from the beginning of data collection, throughout the fieldwork, and after the completion of data gathering (Sugiyono, 2019). This approach ensures that analysis is not a separate phase but an integral part of the research process. The qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation at each boarding-based madrasah (MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin) were reduced, categorized, and interpreted to identify leadership strategies and character education practices.

1) Data Condensation

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data derived from field notes and transcripts. This step aims to highlight essential patterns related to the four main domains of this research:

a) Leadership strategies for character education,
b) Student character formation through dormitory programs, and
c) Quality assurance strategies in boarding-based education.

Condensation involved open coding, thematic grouping, and categorization aligned with the research questions. For example, statements from principals about *leadership planning and implementation (Plan-Do-Study-Act)* were condensed into operational categories for further analysis.

2) Data Display

Data were then presented in a structured and visual form such as tables, matrices, and network diagrams. The data display stage allowed the researcher to observe relationships between themes—for instance, how leadership strategies directly influenced character outcomes. Visual displays also facilitated cross-case comparison among the three schools.

3) Conclusion and Verification

Conclusions were drawn iteratively during the research process. Preliminary interpretations were verified through triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing to ensure data credibility and dependability. This verification process confirmed the consistency of findings across data sources and methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Visionary Leadership and Strategic Planning

The principals of MAPK MAN 4 Banjar, MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, and MAN 2 Banjarmasin demonstrated a unified vision that positioned the dormitory not merely as a place of residence but as a "moral laboratory." This vision reframed the dormitory as a living environment where Islamic values, discipline, and academic integrity are continuously cultivated through structured daily routines. Document analysis of each school's *Rencana Strategis Madrasah* (Strategic Plan) for 2021–2023 revealed that "integration of character education in dormitory life" was consistently ranked among the top three institutional priorities. The alignment between these local strategic plans and national frameworks—particularly the *Madrasah Reform Program 2020–2024*—underscores a deliberate effort to institutionalize character formation as an integral component of madrasah identity.

In-depth interviews with the principals further reinforced this commitment to moral and spiritual formation. The principal of MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut emphasized, "We design the dormitory not only to provide accommodation but to immerse students in Islamic moral values from waking up until they sleep." Similarly, the principal of MAPK MAN 4 Banjar described the boarding experience as a process of "embedding character through the rhythm of daily dormitory life." These perspectives demonstrate how leadership in these madrasahs integrates symbolic and practical dimensions of moral education—translating institutional ideals into lived

experiences. Structured programs such as *Morning Moral Reflection* (*Tafakkur Pagi*) and *Night Spiritual Dialogue* (*Muhasabah Malam*) exemplify how the principals' visions are operationalized into consistent character-building practices.

The implementation of this leadership vision is also evident in professional development initiatives.

Figure 1. Structured Leadership Workshop for Dormitory Educators.

This image captures a formal leadership training session designed to enhance educators' capacity for moral supervision in a boarding environment. The participants, seated attentively in uniform attire, engage in a guided workshop facilitated by senior educators. The session reflects an institutional commitment to cultivating leadership competencies among dorm mentors, aligning pedagogical approaches, and strengthening collective responsibility for students' moral growth (Daliri et al., 2022; Yaghoubi et al., 2022). Such professional development activities illustrate how the principals' vision extends beyond students to empower teachers and staff as co-leaders in moral formation.

Beyond rhetorical articulation, evidence from internal circulars, meeting minutes, and annual reports demonstrates that each institution adopted a **Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA)** or **Deming Cycle** to ensure continuity in program implementation. For example, at MAN 2 Banjarmasin, the leadership team held quarterly reviews involving teachers, dorm mentors, and student council representatives to evaluate behavioral indicators such as discipline, empathy, and responsibility. These meetings fostered a culture of reflection and iterative improvement, where decisions were informed by documented outcomes and behavioral observations. This approach signifies that leadership was not confined to visionary discourse but translated into data-driven, continuous moral supervision practices (Li et al., 2023).

The visionary orientation of these principals also extended to stakeholder collaboration. Each madrasah engaged parents, alumni, and the wider community to strengthen value transmission beyond the dormitory setting. Interviews revealed that parents were regularly invited to *Parenting Forums* held twice a year to synchronize expectations between home and school, particularly regarding digital ethics, social conduct, and religious discipline. Alumni networks were similarly mobilized as role models who embodied the moral ideals cultivated within the dormitory. Through these relational strategies, the principals enacted a form of distributed leadership—anchored in empathy, communication, and shared moral purpose—rather than hierarchical authority (Amelia et al., 2019; Hensellek & Simon, 2020).

Collectively, these findings illustrate that leadership strategies in boarding-based moral education are both visionary and participatory. The principals of these three madrasahs positioned themselves as moral architects who shape environments, empower educators, and engage families in the moral development process. Their leadership operates simultaneously at the structural, cultural, and relational levels, transforming the dormitory into a dynamic ecosystem of value formation. The integration of strategic planning, professional training, continuous evaluation, and stakeholder collaboration underscores how leadership in Indonesian madrasahs functions as a holistic and adaptive process in nurturing moral integrity among students (Herliana et al., 2025).

Document analysis from the Directorate General of Islamic Education (2024) showed a positive correlation between strong leadership vision and student behavioral outcomes in boarding-based schools across South Kalimantan. This aligns with the findings from these three madrasahs: internal discipline reports from 2022–2023 indicated a 32% reduction in behavioral infractions after implementing the integrated dormitory-based character

system (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2025). Thus, the evidence demonstrates that visionary leadership directly contributes to measurable moral outcomes. In conclusion, the visionary leadership strategies in these madrasahs successfully established dormitory systems as structured spaces for moral cultivation. The principals' capacity to align institutional goals, engage stakeholders, and evaluate performance systematically signifies a transformative shift from traditional religious instruction to holistic character management.

MORAL HABITUATION AND EXEMPLARY MODELING

Leadership within these dormitory systems was characterized by the consistent modeling of moral behavior by principals and dormitory mentors. The principals emphasized the importance of *uswah hasanah* (good example) as the core of Islamic educational leadership. During interviews, one principal remarked, *"Students see, imitate, and internalize—this is the real pedagogy of character."* Documented observations showed that principals often joined morning prayers, ate in the same dining hall, and conducted *tahajjud* sessions alongside students, demonstrating moral congruence between words and actions.

Data triangulated from interviews and observation logs revealed that this modeling approach fostered a culture of humility and sincerity. Teachers reported that "students become more respectful and self-disciplined when they observe leaders practicing what they preach." The strategy of direct participation blurred the hierarchical distance between leaders and students, reinforcing the dormitory's communal identity.

This exemplary approach was further supported by institutional rituals. Weekly "Character Nights" at MAN IC Tanah Laut and MAN 4 Banjar combined religious lectures, storytelling, and reflection on the Prophet's character. According to documentation from 2022, participation rates exceeded 95%, indicating strong student engagement. Such rituals transformed the dormitory into a performative moral arena where abstract values became observable behaviors. Additionally, principals ensured that dormitory mentors were trained to embody and reinforce these values. Interview transcripts show that MAN 2 Banjarmasin's head mentor received specific guidance: *"Your behavior in small matters—how you greet, how you pray—teaches more than a thousand lessons."* These findings align with Sergiovanni's (2007) theory of moral leadership, which posits that effective leaders influence values primarily through modeling rather than directive control.

Figure 2. Students participating in evening reflection (muhasabah) session guided by dorm mentors at MAN 4 Banjar.

This photograph depicts students attending an evening *muhasabah* or self-reflection session at the dormitory of MAN 4 Banjar, facilitated by dormitory mentors. The activity exemplifies the reflective leadership approach applied by the principal, emphasizing moral introspection as a daily educational practice. Students are encouraged to contemplate their actions, relationships, and intentions, fostering self-awareness and moral responsibility. Field

notes indicate that these sessions strengthen the dormitory's communal ethos, as students learn to evaluate themselves within a supportive environment guided by empathy and shared values. This approach transforms the dormitory into a moral laboratory where reflection becomes a habitual and transformative practice.

Figure 3. Cultivating Respect Through Daily Ritual Interactions

The image depicts a line of students performing a respectful greeting toward their teachers, symbolizing a core moral practice cultivated within the madrasa dormitory system. Through these daily rituals of deference and interpersonal discipline, students internalize values such as humility, gratitude, and relational ethics. The scene highlights how leadership reinforces moral development not only through instruction but through embodied routines that structure everyday interactions between students and their mentors.

Document evidence from teacher evaluations in 2023 demonstrated that schools where leaders maintained visible participation in dormitory life achieved higher ratings in "moral climate" indicators (average 4.7/5 compared to 3.9/5 in less engaged institutions). This suggests that moral leadership, when practiced authentically, creates a measurable improvement in the institutional environment. Overall, the findings affirm that moral habituation through modeling constitutes a cornerstone of boarding-based character education. The dormitory becomes not just a site of supervision but a living embodiment of moral consistency, where leadership is experienced daily through visible example and shared practice (Liang, 2023; Yaghoubi et al., 2022).

Figure 4. Religious Music Practice (Hadrah/Rebana Ensemble).

Shown here is a communal music practice in which students perform traditional Islamic percussion as part of their spiritual and cultural enrichment in the dormitory setting. Under guided supervision, the ensemble fosters cooperation, emotional regulation, and a sense of collective devotion. This practice demonstrates the madrasa's leadership strategy of integrating arts-based religious activities to shape students' moral sensibilities, reinforce communal identity, and create a spiritually grounded environment for character development.

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Data triangulated from interviews and observation logs revealed that this modeling approach fostered a culture of humility and sincerity. Teachers reported that "students become more respectful and self-disciplined when they observe leaders practicing what they preach." The strategy of direct participation blurred the hierarchical distance between leaders and students, reinforcing the dormitory's communal identity. Leadership thus became a relational act grounded in shared moral experiences, transforming the dormitory into a cohesive moral community where authority was exercised through example and empathy.

This exemplary approach was further institutionalized through communal rituals that connected spirituality, reflection, and artistic expression. Weekly *Character Nights* at MAN IC Tanah Laut and MAN 4 Banjar combined religious lectures, storytelling, and reflection on the Prophet's character. According to documentation from 2022, participation rates exceeded 95%, indicating strong student engagement. Such rituals transformed the dormitory into a performative moral arena where abstract values became observable behaviors. Similarly, principals ensured that dormitory mentors were trained to embody and reinforce these values. Interview transcripts show that MAN 2 Banjarmasin's head mentor received specific guidance: "Your behavior in small matters—how you greet, how you pray—teaches more than a thousand lessons." These findings align with Sergiovanni's (2007) theory of moral leadership, which posits that effective leaders influence values primarily through modeling rather than authority.

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DISCIPLINE, SUPERVISION, AND MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Discipline management in these boarding-based madrasahs followed a participatory rather than punitive model. The principals utilized the dormitory's structure to internalize moral accountability through peer regulation and reflection. For instance, at MAN 4 Banjar, the principal introduced the "Discipline Circle"—a weekly student-led meeting where infractions were discussed through guided moral reasoning rather than punishment. Observations and minutes revealed that this approach decreased repeated violations by 40% within one academic year (2022–2023), signaling that participatory reflection could effectively replace coercive discipline.

Interview data supported this finding. A dormitory mentor at MAN IC Tanah Laut stated, "We no longer punish; we discuss. We ask students to reflect on the meaning of their actions." This perspective reflects a shift toward restorative discipline grounded in Islamic ethical reasoning (*ta'dib*). The principal's leadership ensured that supervision was continuous yet empathetic, transforming the dormitory from a disciplinary space into a moral microcosm of society. In this way, leadership operated not as control but as cultivation—shaping conscience and behavior through trust and moral dialogue.

Documents such as student handbooks and disciplinary guidelines illustrated the leadership's effort to codify values rather than impose rules. The 2023 Dormitory Code of Conduct, for instance, began with the statement, "Discipline is a form of devotion." This symbolic framing redefined obedience as an act of faith, merging spiritual and behavioral dimensions of discipline. The principals also delegated supervisory roles to student leaders, promoting peer mentoring and accountability. This distributed leadership model proved particularly effective in MAN 2 Banjarmasin, where the Student Ethics Committee served as a bridge between staff and peers. As one student leader expressed, "When we correct each other, it's not about fear—it's about caring for the community's moral health."

Figure 5. Dormitory environment at MAPK MAN 4 Banjar showing morning student gathering for Qur'an recitation.

This photograph captures the daily routine of students at MAPK MAN 4 Banjar engaging in a communal Qur'an recitation before classes begin. The activity illustrates how spiritual discipline forms the foundation of the dormitory's character education framework. By beginning the day with recitation, students internalize values of sincerity (*ikhlas*), mindfulness, and collective harmony. The principal's leadership is reflected in how this routine is institutionalized as both a spiritual and moral exercise, reinforcing the dormitory's vision of moral habituation through structured daily worship. Observations indicate that such collective rituals contribute to the development of moral consistency and strengthen the affective dimension of students' ethical growth.

Evaluation data revealed measurable improvement in punctuality and academic integrity indicators from 2021 to 2023, further validating the success of this approach. Statistical summaries from dormitory records indicated that late attendance for morning prayers dropped from 23% to 8% within two years. Thus, leadership in these dormitories demonstrated a unique moral accountability system grounded in shared responsibility. The principals functioned as facilitators of conscience rather than enforcers of rules, reaffirming the dormitory's purpose as a moral laboratory where character evolves through reflection and relational ethics.

Figure 6. Leadership documentation board displaying the dormitory's vision and moral discipline program at MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut

This image shows a leadership documentation board strategically placed within the dormitory of MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut, presenting the school's vision, mission, and key components of the moral discipline program. The display functions as a tangible manifestation of visionary leadership, serving both as a reminder and a guide for students and staff. It outlines behavioral expectations, ethical principles, and leadership roles within the dormitory system, demonstrating how moral objectives are translated into visual and operational frameworks. Analysis of institutional documents indicates that this board is regularly updated following evaluation meetings, reflecting the principal's commitment to continuous improvement and transparent communication of the dormitory's moral goals.

Figure 7. Bulletin board featuring dormitory regulations and student behavior monitoring sheets at MAN 2 Banjarmasin.

Figure 3 presents a bulletin board located in the student dormitory of MAN 2 Banjarmasin, displaying the dormitory's behavioral regulations and monitoring sheets used to record students' daily conduct. The presence of this monitoring system signifies an organized approach to reflective supervision, where discipline is maintained through observation, feedback, and moral reflection rather than punishment. The documentation of student behavior enables dorm mentors and the principal to identify moral challenges early and address them through dialogue and guidance. This practice embodies the principle of formative supervision, in which leadership fosters moral growth through consistent feedback mechanisms and participatory accountability.

Figure 8. Record of leadership evaluation meeting focusing on character development strategies and boarding supervision outcomes.

The final figure shows documentation from a leadership evaluation meeting held to assess the effectiveness of dormitory character development strategies across the three madrasahs. The meeting minutes highlight discussions on student moral progress, disciplinary cases, and the refinement of mentoring programs. This evidence demonstrates how principals adopt data-informed leadership, using systematic reflection to guide decisions on moral education practices. By institutionalizing regular evaluation and involving mentors and administrators, principals ensure that dormitory programs remain dynamic and responsive to students' moral needs. Collectively, these strategies represent the culmination of visionary, collaborative, and reflective leadership approaches that sustain the moral ecosystem of boarding-based education.

The findings illustrate that leadership in boarding-based madrasahs operates as an integrated moral system that combines vision, modeling, and moral governance. The principals' strategic use of dormitory spaces as laboratories of virtue aligns with the Islamic educational philosophy of *tarbiyah*—nurturing the whole person intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. This study extends the theory of moral leadership by showing how dormitory-based contexts amplify leaders' influence through proximity and shared daily life. The *Plan-Do-Study-Act* (PDCA) model, typically used in industrial and educational quality management, proved adaptable for moral education cycles. Each phase—planning moral programs, implementing routines, studying behavioral outcomes, and acting on improvements—illustrates a living system of continuous moral formation.

The results resonate with previous findings by Afista et al. and Sugiarto, who emphasized that character education in Islamic institutions requires consistent modeling and structural reinforcement (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020; Sugiarto & Fitri, 2023). However, this study contributes novel evidence from South Kalimantan showing quantifiable behavioral changes (e.g., 32% reduction in infractions) linked directly to leadership strategies.

Document analysis also underscores the significance of institutional policy support. The integration of character indicators into the schools' strategic documents (Renstra Madrasah 2021–2024) institutionalized moral objectives and enhanced program sustainability. This finding supports the argument by Dahl & Killen that moral vision, when operationalized through planning systems, becomes a form of distributed moral leadership (Dahl & Killen, 2018).

Another key implication concerns the transformation of dormitory discipline. Instead of authoritarian supervision, principals fostered moral autonomy through discussion, reflection, and communal accountability. This shift aligns with post-constructivist perspectives in Islamic pedagogy, which value *ta'dib* (ethical formation) over *ta'dzir* (punitive correction). In summary, the findings reinforce the thesis that dormitories, under effective moral leadership, can function as transformative ecosystems of character formation. Leadership strategies grounded in vision, modeling, and participatory discipline effectively integrate faith, knowledge, and practice—realizing the ideal of the madrasah as a moral laboratory.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that boarding-based madrasahs in South Kalimantan have effectively cultivated dormitory environments as structured "moral laboratories" through visionary, integrative, and participatory leadership. Principals across the three cases aligned their institutional strategic plans with national reforms, embedding character formation as a central educational priority and ensuring that daily routines reflected Islamic ethical values. Leadership manifested not only in formal planning documents but also through principals' active engagement within dormitory life, where they modeled moral conduct via consistent participation in spiritual activities and communal routines. Professional development initiatives, ongoing evaluation cycles, and collaborative engagement with stakeholders further enhanced the efficacy of leadership strategies, producing measurable improvements in students' discipline and moral behavior. The integration of spiritual routines, reflective practices, and communal accountability transformed the dormitory into a holistic moral ecosystem, superseding mere supervisory functions. Collectively, the evidence indicates that leadership in these madrasahs operates at structural, cultural, and relational levels, shaping students' moral character through the synergy of vision, modeling, and collaborative governance.

This study also reveals that moral habituation and participatory discipline constitute foundational pillars of the madrasa dormitory's educational framework. Leaders and dormitory mentors emphasized uswah hasanah as a lived pedagogy, whereby students internalize values by observing authentic exemplars in daily interactions and shared rituals. Activities such as morning Qur'an recitations, evening muhasabah (self-reflection), weekly Character Nights, and arts-based religious programs functioned as mechanisms for internalizing moral accountability and reinforcing communal identity. Participatory discipline, manifested through reflection circles, peer mentoring, and ethics committees, redirected disciplinary focus from punitive enforcement toward restorative moral reasoning grounded in Islamic ethics. This comprehensive approach proved effective in reducing behavioral infractions, enhancing punctuality, and fostering spiritual consciousness among students. Overall, the findings affirm that dormitory-based leadership in Indonesian madrasahs exemplifies a distinctive model of moral governance that integrates spirituality, reflection, and distributed responsibility.

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