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CHARACTER BUILDING AS AN ACADEMIC FOUNDATION TOWARDS AN EXCELLENT ISLAMIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze character building among students through intracurricular activities at Madrasah Aliyah Darud Da'wah Wal Irsyad (MA DDI) Baruga. The research focuses on the role of teachers in classroom learning, the teaching methods applied, and the strategies used to internalize character values within intracurricular activities. This research employs a qualitative approach, in which the researcher directly visited the field to conduct observations, interviews, and document analysis. The primary data sources are the principal and teachers who are directly involved in implementing intracurricular activities. Data were analyzed using the NVIVO application through several stages, namely open coding, axial coding, and visualization. The findings indicate that character building in intracurricular activities is manifested primarily in biology and mathematics classes through project-based learning models. The character values internalized include integrity, independence, cooperation, and religiosity. The process of internalization is not carried out rigidly or dogmatically but through dialogic learning that stimulates students' moral and spiritual awareness. This approach aligns with the moral knowing dimension of Lickona's character education theory, emphasizing cognitive understanding accompanied by reflection on values. It also resonates with the Mandar cultural value of malagbig, which upholds manners and honor as a noble social identity. Thus, the learning process at MA DDI Baruga serves not only as a medium for knowledge transfer but also as an effort to shape students' character rooted in Islamic teachings, modern educational theory, and local wisdom.

Keywords

Character Building, Intracurricular Activities, Islamic Education, Local Wisdom, Mandar Culture.



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INTRODUCTION

One of the efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia is the emergence of the concept of character education as a fundamental foundation for moral and intellectual development. Academically, this concept has inspired education scholars and practitioners to explore more comprehensive theories of moral development and values-based learning. The growing awareness among educational experts is not without reason; it arises from the moral degradation evident in students' behavior over recent decades (Lessy et al., 2024). On a broader scale, this is reflected in the decline of empathy, social awareness, and civic participation among young people, particularly in their reduced engagement in humanitarian and volunteer activities (Narvaez, 2021). This phenomenon reveals that education has not only lost its moral dimension but also its social function as a medium for nurturing civic responsibility and empathy.

Indonesia's education system today faces serious challenges related to moral decline among students, both in urban and rural areas, including in religious-based institutions such as madrasahs. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission show increasing cases of bullying, violence, and student involvement in delinquency, such as drug abuse, vandalism, and gang fights (KPAI, 2023). These behaviors indicate a moral crisis within educational institutions. The erosion of moral values, such as respect, self-discipline, and empathy, reflects systemic weaknesses in moral instruction at both school and home. To address this, the Indonesian government initiated the *Character Education Strengthening Program* (PPK) through Presidential Regulation No. 87/2017, emphasizing five core values: religiosity, nationalism, independence, integrity, and cooperation. This national movement was later aligned with the *Merdeka Curriculum* reinforcing character formation as the nucleus of educational quality (kemdikbud.go.id, 2024).

Previous studies have extensively examined the conceptual and philosophical foundations of character education, emphasizing its moral, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions (Adha et al., 2025; Nurrahman et al., 2025; N. L. G. N. K. Sari, 2024; Syaripudin & Hasna, 2025). Several works underline the integration of religious and ethical principles into formal education as the cornerstone of character formation (Gherasim, 2024; Guna & Yuwantiningrum, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Solihin et al., 2020). Al-Qur'an-based character education highlights Islamic values as the moral framework for shaping students' personalities (Arumsari et al., 2025; Arzaqi & Soleh, 2024; Carmidin & Sukron, 2025; Zain et al., 2024). Building the character of Indonesian students through character education focuses on the essential role of educators as moral exemplars (Agustin et al.,

2024; Faiz & Purwati, 2022; Judrah et al., 2024; Kasingku & Lotulung, 2024). Meanwhile, the role of islamic education teachers in character building for students in the digital age explores how technological innovation supports moral cultivation (Darlan et al., 2021; Huda et al., 2022; Muis et al., 2022; Siregar, 2021). These studies affirm the centrality of educators and institutional culture in shaping students' character. However, most of them remain conceptual, focusing on policy or higher education contexts rather than practical implementation at the secondary Islamic level.

The existing gap lies in the lack of empirical studies that examine *how* character building is implemented concretely in madrasahs through intracurricular learning. Previous studies seldom describe the direct roles of teachers, teaching methods, and strategies for value internalization within classroom settings. This research addresses that gap by investigating the practical dimensions of character building through intracurricular activities at *Madrasah Aliyah Darud Da'wah Wal Irsyad* (MA DDI) Baruga. The novelty of this study lies in its contextual approach—examining how character values are operationalized in daily classroom practice and how these processes contribute to the creation of an *excellent madrasah* that integrates Islamic values, modern pedagogy, and local Mandar wisdom.

Before this study was conducted, character education at MA DDI Baruga faced several challenges. Preliminary observations and interviews with teachers revealed that the school's learning activities focused primarily on achieving academic targets, while value-based discussions were often implicit and fragmented. Students showed high cognitive ability but varied levels of moral awareness, particularly in self-discipline and cooperation. The principal acknowledged that the madrasah needed a more systematic approach to embed character education into daily learning. Although religious teachings were strong, their practical internalization in intracurricular activities especially in science and mathematics had not been fully optimized. This situation made character education an urgent institutional priority, ensuring that academic excellence aligns with moral development.

The importance of implementing character education at MA DDI Baruga lies in its mission to balance *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deep understanding of religion) with modern competence. The school's policy responds to this challenge by integrating character education into intracurricular programs rather than treating it as a separate moral subject. Through project-based learning and teacherguided reflection, values such as integrity, cooperation, and religiosity are internalized organically during lessons. This approach aligns with the madrasah's vision of producing students who are

not only intellectually capable but also morally upright and socially responsible. Therefore, this research focuses on how intracurricular activities function as a medium for character building at MA DDI Baruga, exploring teachers' roles, classroom strategies, and internalization models that embody the integration of Islamic values and local cultural ethics.

METHOD

This study employed a field research design with a descriptive qualitative approach (Creswell, 2003), conducted at *Madrasah Aliyah Swasta Darud Da'wah Wal Irsyad* (MA DDI) Baruga, located in Baruga District, Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi. The research was carried out over four months, from February to May 2025, during which the researcher conducted intensive observations of intracurricular learning activities and teacher-student interactions. The purpose of choosing this location was that MA DDI Baruga represents a madrasah that combines Islamic values with modern learning strategies and has implemented a character-based education policy.

The primary data in this study consist of observations, interviews, and documentation. The primary data sources were the school principal and six teachers directly involved in intracurricular activities, particularly in biology and mathematics classes. Observations were conducted throughout the 2024 fall semester, focusing on learning processes, classroom atmosphere, and teacher strategies for internalizing character values. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and selected students to gather diverse perspectives on the practice of character building in classroom activities. Documentation data were collected from school archives, including lesson plans, curriculum documents, activity reports, and photos of learning activities at MA DDI Baruga, which were analyzed to strengthen the field findings.

The process of managing and analyzing data followed the steps of qualitative research data analysis: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Huberman, 2019). Thematic analysis was applied using NVivo 12 Plus to categorize and code the qualitative data. The analysis involved identifying, interpreting, and grouping themes emerging from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation (Lewis, 2015). The coding process consisted of three main stages—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—followed by visualization of relationships between concepts to illustrate the model of character building in intracurricular activities at MA DDI Baruga. These steps were carried out systematically to ensure data validity

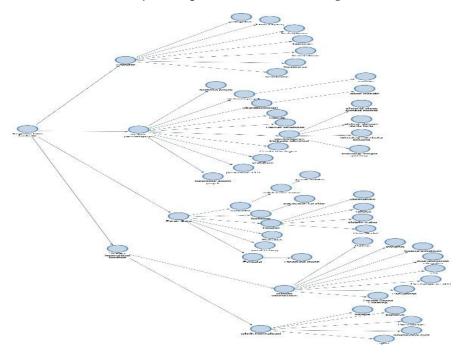
and strengthen the interpretation of character internalization patterns that emerged in the learning process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Intracurricular activities are learning experiences that occur within the classroom as part of the primary curriculum established by the educational unit. At Madrasah Aliyah DDI Baruga, these activities are not only aimed at improving students' academic competence but also serve as a means of internalizing character values. Based on data obtained by researchers through observation, indepth interviews, and document studies, the following is a visualization of the project map in MA DDI Baruga's intra-curricular activities.

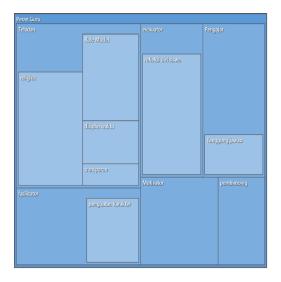
Figure 1. Visualization of the Project Map in the MA DDI Baruga Intra-Curricular Activities



The image above is a visualization in the form of a project map design in the NVIVO application. Based on the data obtained at the research site, the researcher found that there were various roles of teachers in classroom learning, then the methods used by teachers in classroom learning, the interconnection between the roles of teachers in the learning process in building student character, then the strategies taken by teachers in the process of internalizing character values during learning, and the relationship between the learning methods used and the techniques or strategies of internalization. The following will be described individually.

The researcher found that there were various roles of teachers in classroom learning:

Figure 2. Visualization of the Hierarchy Chart of Teachers' Roles in Learning

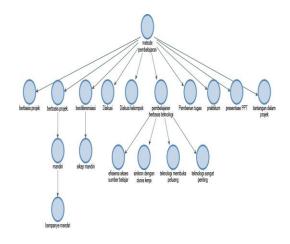


In the learning process that has been taking place at MA DDI Baruga, teachers, as role models, have played the most crucial role among all others. Teachers are not only conveyors of information or knowledge, but also essential figures who are emulated and exemplified by students in various aspects of life.

Teaching Methods in the Classroom:

Teaching methods refer to the strategies used by educators to deliver lesson material to students, aiming to achieve predetermined learning objectives. At Madarah Aliyah DDI, teachers employ a range of methods to present new material or information to students. These methods encompass various techniques, approaches, and procedures designed to facilitate students' understanding, skills, and character development in the learning process.

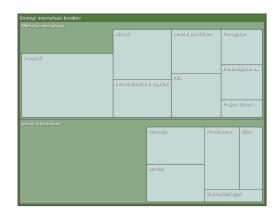
Figure 3. Visualization of the Learning Method Project Map



Strategies for Internalizing Character Values in Learning:

The internalization of character values in learning is a process that aims to instill moral and ethical values in students, making them an integral part of their personality. With the right approach, the internalization of character values can be achieved and become an essential part of students, aiming to shape individuals who are not only academically excellent but also possess positive attitudes, ethics, and personalities in their social lives. Based on the data collected by researchers at the research site through interviews and documentation, the following are the results of the analysis presented in the project map visualization.

Figure 4. Visualization of the Project Map for the Strategy of Internalizing Values in Learning



Discussion

The findings reveal that intracurricular activities at *Madrasah Aliyah DDI Baruga* function as a systematic medium for integrating character education within formal learning. Teachers not only act as conveyors of academic material but also as moral exemplars who embody and transmit ethical values. This aligns with Lickona's (1991) theory of character education, which emphasizes the triadic model of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Kurniawan & Fitriyani, 2023; Suroso & Husin, 2024). At MA DDI Baruga, teachers demonstrate this integration through their behavior, communication patterns, and the way they manage classroom interactions. The project map visualization shows that teachers' roles are central nodes connecting instructional strategies with value internalization. This supports Narvaez's (2021) view that character formation in schools depends on social modeling and moral discourse, indicating that values are best internalized through lived experiences rather than formal instruction alone (Narvaez, 2021).

Teachers at MA DDI Baruga play diverse roles, including being role models, facilitators, motivators, and evaluators of moral growth. The most dominant role, based on NVivo coding

density, is that of a *moral role model*. This finding reaffirms (Adha et al., 2025; Nurrahman et al., 2025; N. L. G. N. K. Sari, 2024; Syaripudin & Hasna, 2025) assertion that Islamic-based character education must begin with *uswah hasanah*—good exemplarity—because students in madrasahs tend to imitate their teachers' behavior both consciously and unconsciously. In this sense, teaching becomes a moral performance. Compared to (Gherasim, 2024; Guna & Yuwantiningrum, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Solihin et al., 2020) research in universities, the finding here adds nuance by showing that teacher exemplarity in madrasahs operates in closer proximity to students, where personal interaction plays a greater role than policy frameworks. Thus, teacher personality and spiritual consistency become the primary vehicles of value internalization, supporting the thesis that madrasah education inherently embodies moral formation through daily learning.

Regarding teaching methods, the study found that project-based learning and discussion-centered instruction dominate the intracurricular process. Teachers intentionally design lessons that combine academic objectives with character reflection, particularly in biology and mathematics. This reflects the constructivist principle that students learn meaning through active engagement and moral reasoning by Vygotsky (Erbil, 2020; Newman & Latifi, 2021). In this context, project-based learning offers students opportunities to practice responsibility, cooperation, and honesty through collaborative tasks. The finding affirms (Agustin et al., 2024; Faiz & Purwati, 2022; Judrah et al., 2024; Kasingku & Lotulung, 2024) argument that character education should be integrated into all learning aspects rather than treated as a separate moral subject. However, it extends his claim by demonstrating that the integration of moral values into STEM-related lessons (such as biology and mathematics) can be equally effective when mediated through contextual dialogue, reflection, and practical tasks, not only civic or social studies courses.

The strategy of internalizing character values at MA DDI Baruga occurs through dialogic interaction, guided reflection, and experiential learning. Teachers encourage students to express moral reasoning by connecting academic topics with ethical and spiritual implications. This approach resonates with Dewey's (1938) idea of reflective experience, where learning is a moral inquiry that develops self-awareness (Quay, 2019; Schmidt & Allsup, 2019). The NVivo visualization displays thematic nodes, including "dialogue-based reflection," "moral awareness," and "teacherstudent empathy," which form a dense network of interactions. The approach supports Lickona's moral knowing dimension and affirms (Darlan et al., 2021; Huda et al., 2022; Muis et al., 2022; Siregar, 2021) findings, noting that digital-era teachers must cultivate moral sensitivity rather than

relying on didactic preaching. The present study adds that such internalization requires sustained engagement and consistency; character education in MA DDI Baruga is not delivered through sermonizing but through meaningful conversations embedded in academic routines.

Interestingly, the study found that moral internalization at MA DDI Baruga is culturally grounded in the local Mandar value of *malaqbiq*—a moral principle that emphasizes dignity, politeness, and respect. This local wisdom contextualizes universal character values within students' socio-cultural reality, echoing the perspective of indigenous pedagogy(Afendi et al., 2025; Ahmar & Azzajjad, 2025; Hiola & Muis, 2025; S. R. Sari et al., 2025). Such integration bridges Islamic values with local ethics, enabling students to view morality not as an abstract doctrine but as a lived social practice. Compared to previous studies that focused primarily on religious sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith (Arumsari et al., 2025; Arzaqi & Soleh, 2024; Carmidin & Sukron, 2025; Zain et al., 2024), this research offers a localized framework of implementation, affirming that cultural values serve as effective mediators of character education. Thus, MA DDI Baruga represents a synthesis between national character goals and regional moral identity, strengthening its role as a culturally responsive Islamic institution.

The interconnection between teacher roles, teaching methods, and internalization strategies forms a holistic system that sustains character formation. This system is visible in the NVivo project map, where nodes representing "teacher guidance," "student reflection," and "ethical behavior outcomes" are interconnected. Thematic analysis reveals that successful internalization is contingent upon teacher consistency and reinforcement during feedback sessions. This corresponds with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which posits that behavior is learned through observation and reinforcement. The study supports cultivation (Darlan et al., 2021; Huda et al., 2022; Muis et al., 2022; Siregar, 2021) findings on the role of educators as moral agents but diverges by emphasizing collective praxis rather than individual effort. At MA DDI Baruga, moral formation is institutional rather than personal—it is woven into the school culture, assessment systems, and daily interactions, demonstrating a mature model of value internalization within an Islamic secondary school.

Empirically, the results show that intracurricular activities in the MA DDI Baruga contribute significantly to shaping student behavior beyond the classroom. Students reported improved cooperation, discipline, and self-awareness, which indicates effective moral transfer. This aligns with the objectives of Indonesia's *Character Education Strengthening Program* (PPK) and supports Lickona's (1991) view that cognitive understanding must be accompanied by behavioral application. However,

compared with the findings ofnd ((Alfatani & Salsabila, 2024; Imamah, 2025; Qowim et al., 2024; Rahma et al., 2024) on the digital generation, this study reveals that face-to-face dialogic learning remains irreplaceable in shaping moral integrity, particularly in faith-based schools. Therefore, MA DDI Baruga's model affirms that character formation is most effective when embedded in interpersonal communication, mentorship, and shared reflection, rather than relying solely on technology-mediated instruction.

In conclusion, the study's findings affirm the theoretical assumption that intracurricular activities can serve as the nucleus of character formation in Islamic secondary education. By combining teacher exemplarity, interactive pedagogy, and culturally grounded reflection, MA DDI Baruga successfully integrates moral and academic objectives within classroom instruction. This research builds upon previous findings, offering a new perspective: character education must be dynamic, dialogical, and context-sensitive. The case of MA DDI Baruga demonstrates that excellence in madrasahs (*madrasah unggul*) is not defined solely by academic achievement but by the ability to nurture students' moral identity in harmony with Islamic principles and local wisdom. This integrative model could serve as a prototype for other Islamic schools aiming to develop character-centered curricula grounded in authentic cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

The character building of students through intracurricular activities at *Madrasah Aliyah Darud Da'wah Wal Irsyad* (MA DDI) Baruga is effectively integrated into classroom learning, especially in mathematics and biology subjects, where teachers serve as moral exemplars who guide students in internalizing the values of religiosity, integrity, cooperation, and independence. This internalization occurs through reflective dialogue and contextual association between academic content and spiritual meaning, creating a learning environment that shapes both intellect and character. The strength of this study lies in its empirical approach and NVivo-assisted analysis that reveal the systematic interrelation between teacher roles, pedagogical strategies, and moral internalization. However, the limitation lies in its focus on a single institution and its limited scope of subjects. Future studies should broaden the scope to various subjects and contexts to strengthen comparative insights and explore digital approaches in character education within Islamic secondary schools.

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