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Using Religious Character Education to Help Students Develop Exceptional and Moral Character

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study's backdrop stems from the growing emphasis on religious character in recent years. This study aims to explain how Islamic character education is used at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid to help students develop outstanding and honest characters.

Methodology: Interviews, observations, and documentation were used to gather data for a case study approach using a qualitative method.

Main Findings: The study's findings show that incorporating Islamic values into the curriculum, establishing religious practices like congregational prayer, tadarus Al-Qur'an, and daily prayers, and having teachers set an example regarding their attitudes and behavior are all ways to implement religious character education. A structured educational system, teacher collaboration, a positive school climate, and sufficient infrastructure support this implementation's success. In the meantime, challenges include a lack of parental support, scheduling constraints, and various student backgrounds.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The study concludes that while religious character education helps students develop high, disciplined, and responsible morals, it still needs close collaboration between families and schools to produce the best results.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Given the current situation of juvenile delinquency, which is brought on by several environmental causes as well as other reasons such as acts of violence, student fights, stealing, sexual thinking, bullying, and other types, it is necessary to raise awareness of this issue in Indonesian society through character education [1]-[4]. Humans also require knowledge, particularly in school, as it prepares them for future life. This education is necessary to create a good, quality generation that can compete with the outside world [5], [6]. In order to overcome the aforementioned issues, students must receive a strong religious foundation at all educational levels and engage in religious education as a means of preparing them to face societal and global challenges [7]-[11]. There is a disconnect between theory and practice when applying religious character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. Theoretically, students with religious character education can develop strong personalities and high moral standards [12]-[14]. However, in reality, the biggest barriers are a variety of issues, such as a lack of role models, the impact of the outside world, and constraints on curriculum implementation [15]-[17]. In order to combat this issue and ensure that religious character education is successful in molding kids' personalities, cooperation between the community and schools is required. I also discovered that Islamic-based character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah could help students become more disciplined and responsible. However,

there are still challenges in putting it into practice because of the school environment's lack of support and the student's lack of involvement [18]-[20].

Furthermore, according to one of the Islamic religious education instructors at Madrasah Tsanawiyah, incorporating religious principles into the curriculum can only be successful if it is accompanied by regular instruction in the classroom and practice at home [21], [22]. Developing exceptional and honest students is largely dependent on the use of character education. This approach includes incorporating moral and ethical principles into educational activities, the classroom setting, and student interactions. When implemented holistically, character education enhances students' emotional, spiritual, and intellectual intelligence [23]-[26].

This promotes the development of people who can uphold moral principles as a basis for overcoming obstacles in life and having strong intellectual abilities [27]-[29]. Character education is crucial to developing each student, which seeks to create morally upright, responsible, and upbeat adults [30]-[32]. Numerous issues in learning activities undoubtedly have an impact on students' character. Teachers must also stress its importance as the primary factor in developing students' character, directly affecting how well people behave in social and communal settings.

Religious character education aims to mold students' conduct in line with moral and religious principles, which essentially aid in developing personality [33]-[35]. Religious character education is based on values like integrity, accountability, and respect for one another. It is anticipated that kids who internalize these ideals from a young age will grow up to have positive attitudes and behaviors in their daily lives. In suitable conduct during their time in school or even after they graduate [1], [36]-[38]. Religious character education aims to ensure that these ideals are lived out in concrete deeds that last a lifetime and expand students' understanding [39], [40]. Discussing how teachers shape students' personalities will take us to some significant life lessons, starting with morality, whether about individuals, groups, society, a nation, or a country.

Furthermore, one measure that might disclose an individual's quality of life is their morality. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, this is demonstrated by giving an example in the middle of and behind motivation [41], [42]. Teachers have a responsibility to help pupils develop their character for a better life in addition to imparting knowledge.

Through character education, students can use and expand their information, absorb and acquire, and adjust the proper character and ethical principles to be fulfilled in their daily conduct [43]-[45].With practical and significant criteria, this learning paradigm can be effectively implemented. Using a religion-based approach, character and ethical values are integrated into education to develop morally upright and purposeful students [46]-[48].

The rise of issues like the younger generation's decline is one of the detrimental effects. Therefore, schools as educational institutions must be a haven to develop students' character. The truth is that schools must function as both educational institutions and tools for developing kids' exceptional character. The quality of student playgrounds and the school environment has declined due to technological advancements, particularly the internet, which makes it easier to obtain pornographic information [49]-[51]. Thus, it highlights the value of schools in addressing issues in the digital age by emphasizing the development of student's character to shield them from the effects of technological advancements.

Teachers of Islamic religious education play a crucial role in imparting Islamic values suitable for both the general public and educational institutions. Students enrolling in schools get instruction, training, and religious supervision from Islamic Religious Education teachers. Therefore, religious activities can be performed in various contexts and daily life [52]-[54]. Teachers of Islamic Religious Education serve as spiritual mentors who promote applying religious principles in daily life and impart theoretical knowledge.

An active learning method can apply religious character education in schools to help shape students' personalities. It involves giving instructors the space to do it as best they can [55], [56]. Students must actively participate in the development of values by educational concepts. Character development is part of the curriculum that kids need to learn, master, and use daily. Application of organized, practice-based religious education that emphasizes spiritual and moral values like justice, honesty, and compassion. As stated by Maulidiyah et al, implementation is not merely the act of performing tasks but a purposeful plan to accomplish specific objectives [1], [57]. Students' personalities are strategically shaped by using religious character education in schools [58]. In addition to mastering the material, it is hoped that students will also exhibit morals, attitudes, and actions consistent with religious principles, which will help them deal with life's obstacles in the future.

This study has unique relevance because it focuses on applying religious character education within the institutional framework of contemporary Islamic boarding schools, notably Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo. This study emphasizes the dynamics of applying religious ideals interwoven with the Islamic boarding school education system, in contrast to earlier research that typically focuses on public schools or autonomous madrasas. Because Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid instills character through the formal curriculum and the habit of boarding life, a powerful medium in developing students' personalities, this context adds its own color.

This study provides a more comprehensive approach by examining how the collaboration of educators, the madrasa setting, and extracurricular religious activities might enhance students' integrity and personal greatness. This study highlights the significance of institutional culture and direct examples from educators and caregivers as determining factors in forming a complete and grounded religious character. In contrast, many previous studies only address aspects of the curriculum or learning methods in character education.

Based on the distinctive ideals created by Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid, such as honesty, independence, responsibility, and humility, this study also elevates signs of outstanding and integrity personality as the primary differentiator. In addition to being theoretically defined, these principles are also demonstrated in the actual daily lives of the students. This study offers conceptual and practical insights to create a contextual, flexible, and long-lasting religious character education model in a madrasah setting based on a pesantren. The consistent application of religious character education and the participation of all stakeholders in the school present difficulties. However, children can develop outstanding and honorable characters by incorporating role models, habituation, and cultural strengthening.

The significance of religious character education in forming students' personalities has been the subject of numerous earlier studies. Jannah stressed that students' personalities can be significantly influenced in madrasas by implementing religious ideals through habituation exercises [43]. Furthermore, Khaidi and Suud's research demonstrated that Islamic Religious Education is successful in helping high school pupils develop morally upright and responsible personalities [21]. Strengthening Islamic Religious Education values affects pupils' independent character development, according to similar research by Taufik [20]. These results demonstrate the critical role that religiously orientated character education plays in helping pupils develop outstanding and moral characters. However, the implementation of religious character education within the framework of Islamic boarding school-based education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo makes this study unique. This study looks at how institutional culture, the role of teachers, the madrasa setting, and religious activities interact within a single educational system, in contrast to other research that looked at curriculum or learning methods. Therefore, the primary strength and distinction from the earlier study is the employed holistic strategy.

Students' character is more consistently shaped when the boarding life background is incorporated into the formal educational process. In this study, qualities like integrity, accountability, self-reliance, and humility are developed through classroom instruction and students' everyday experiences under the close supervision of educators and carers. This scientific contribution is crucial when creating a model for religious character education in other madrasas.

This research is significant because it endeavors to address the issues of moral decadence among teenagers, which are becoming more concerning due to the digital world's influence and inadequate social role models. Character education can be a moral stronghold for the next generation as they face the modern world's problems if religious principles are infused into education and school culture. Thus, this study's findings would contribute theoretically and practically to the creation of a contextual and long-lasting model of religious character education based on Islamic boarding schools.

This study aims to thoroughly describe the religious character education implementation process at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo, including the obstacles encountered and the elements that contribute to its success. It also attempts to gather helpful suggestions for madrasas or other Islamic educational institutions looking to successfully and quantifiably apply religious character education. This study's distinctiveness stems from its all-encompassing methodology, which integrates curriculum components, teacher role models, religious activity practices, and an Islamic boarding school culture as a system of character development. In contrast to earlier research, this study offers an actual practice model that other Islamic educational institutions might use as a guide.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study examines how Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo uses religious character education to mold students' personalities. Qualitative research methodology using a case study or descriptive approach. This technique was selected because it enables in-depth research on students' viewpoints and experiences implementing religious ideals [59]. The descriptive technique also aids in comprehending the several activities that include pupils in religious activities at school, including reading the Koran, congregational prayers, extracurricular activities, and other religious value habituation programs. Furthermore, to mold students' personalities, teachers must be able to teach them character values through character education [60], [61]. Interviews are a method of gathering data in which the interviewer asks respondents oral questions that necessitate explanations [62]. Moleong defines qualitative research as the process of comprehending phenomena in their entirety and through verbal and linguistic descriptions, including behavior, perception, motivation, and behavior experienced by research subjects that are explored in a particular context using a variety of techniques

[63]-[65]. Employing the aforementioned study methodology will present a comprehensive and lucid image of how religious character education molds students' personalities and impacts their conduct in daily life.

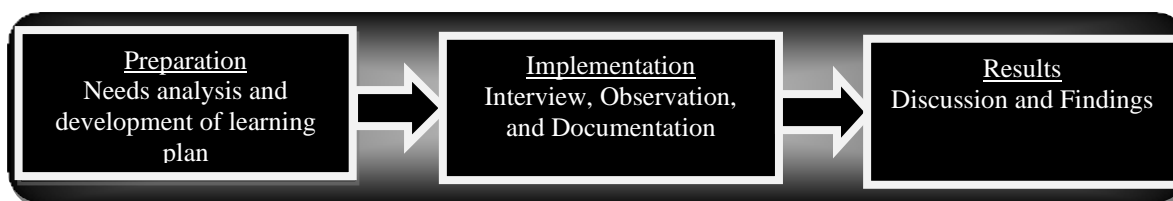| Preparation Needs analysis and development of learning plan | ➤ | Implementation Interview, Observation, and Documentation | ➤ | Results Discussion and Findings |

Figure 1. Flow of research implementation

This study combines a case study methodology with a qualitative approach. This approach aims to obtain a thorough grasp of how religious character education is implemented at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid within the framework of Islamic boarding school-based education. Through case studies, researchers can examine educational processes in authentic and contextual ways, including student and instructor behavior, interactions, and subjective experiences. All of the students and teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid made up the population of this study, and the sample was chosen explicitly from among Islamic Religious Education instructors, eighth and ninth graders, and madrasah principals who were thought to be knowledgeable about and actively involved in the implementation of religious character education.

This selection method is predicated on determining who is most pertinent and instructive within the study's setting. Some study tools utilized include documentation, observation sheets, and semi-structured interview protocols. Teachers and students were interviewed to find out how they felt about religious character education being used. The observations aimed to examine religious habituation activities in the madrasah setting firsthand. In the meantime, records, including schedules of spiritual activities, yearly programs, and curricular materials, were acquired from school archives.

Three primary methods of gathering data were used: documentation studies, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews. To get genuine and comprehensive data, the researchers actively participated in the madrasah setting during the three-month data collection process. Triangulation of sources and procedures ensured the veracity of the data. The Miles and Huberman model's interactive analysis method, which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, was used to examine the gathered data. The preparation and licensing phase, data collection, validation, analysis, and results reporting were the first steps in the research process. The ethical guidelines for qualitative research were followed throughout the entire process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Implementation of Religious Character Education in Forming Superior and Integrity Student Personalities

Based on the results of research findings at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid. The implementation of religious character education that is held is:

The implementation is by integrating the values of religious character education in forming student personalities, which is carried out through strategies such as integration in the curriculum by instilling religious values in subjects and the habituation of spiritual activities, such as praying before and after learning activities, worshiping together, and speaking politely and honestly. In addition, the example of teachers and education personnel is essential in forming student character through discipline, honesty, and good morals.

Implementing religious character education is essential in forming superior and integrity student personalities. Through instilling religious values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility, students are expected to be able to internalize positive attitudes and behaviors in everyday life. Moreover, students are expected to be able to internalize religious values in everyday life so that a character with noble morals and high integrity is formed. This study was conducted at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, showing that implementing religious character education through the santri trilogy and the five awareness of santri effectively forms students' religious character. In addition, before learning activities occur, teachers must prepare lesson plans and synchronize them with religious values, both general subjects and religious lessons. Based on an interview with Mrs. S, an Islamic religious education teacher, on February 12, 2025, "In addition, teachers are also required to be able to find the relationship between the material to be studied and the verses of the Qur'an or hadith."
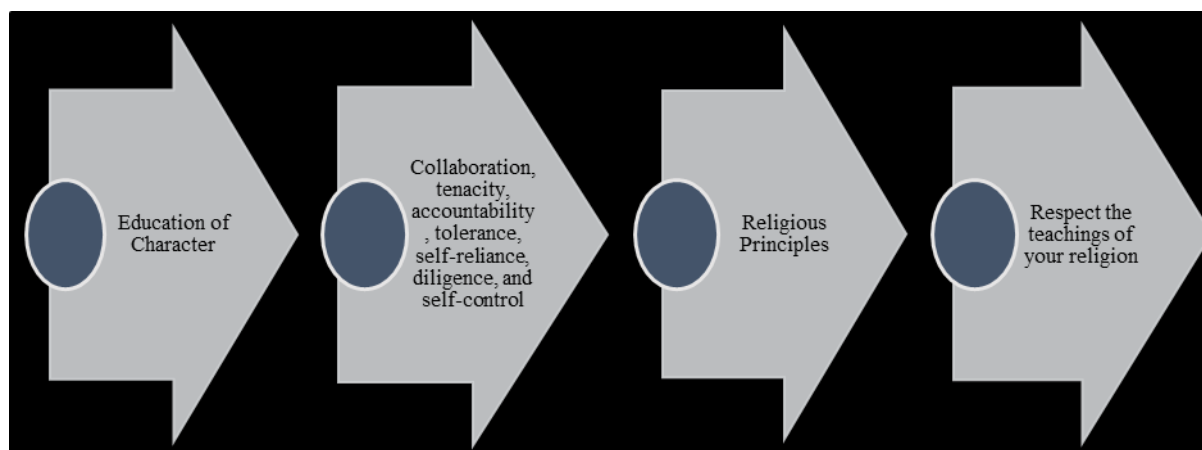
Figure 2. The flow is designed to help students develop exceptional and moral character

The table above demonstrates how religiously grounded character education encompasses a range of topics that mold children into morally upright, self-reliant, disciplined adults. Through the application of qualities like cooperation, perseverance, responsibility, patience, and adherence to religious principles, students should be able to live in harmony on their own and a group setting.

Putting religious character education into practice for Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid kids. by incorporating or adding qualities for self-development, such as regular activities. The school-planned congregational dhuha and dhuhur prayers, as well as the recitation of the Qur'an in every class, are among the regular activities conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid. Based on the February 18, 2025, interview with Mrs. RS, an Islamic religious education teacher. This is one of the standard programs designed to help kids develop their spiritual character.

Role modeling is the next step in implementing religious character education for students. Based on an interview conducted on March 2, 2025, with Mr. NK, a disciplinary teacher. Explaining how important it is to be a role model in the school environment so that students can easily practice religious character values if supported by the role model of all students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid. Teachers of Islamic Religious Education are not the only ones with this duty; all subject matter experts must be able to set a positive example for pupils in every activity. It is impossible to overstate the significance of role models in fostering religious character. When teachers provide good examples, students find it easier to apply the religious values taught. This "example is an absolute factor that teachers must possess." Role models are crucial in character education because they help students develop positive attitudes. In the context of character education, teacher role models are reflected through consistency in carrying out religious commands, avoiding prohibitions, showing concern for the fate of the less fortunate, and being persistent in achieving individual and social achievements. Exemplary behavior also includes being resilient in the face of difficulties, setbacks, and temptations and being quick to act and realize goals. Based on an interview with Mrs. NF, a Islamic religious education teacher, on March 2, 2025, she explained the implementation of religious character education in schools, which is carried out in the classroom to shape students' personalities. These activities are by the program that the school has designed. This tries to raise students' awareness of the significance of religious values, particularly in reciting the Qur'an together. It is based on interviews with multiple teachers and sharing activities that are conducted in the classroom, such as reciting the Qur'an daily before the teaching and learning process.

The program implemented annually to instill religious character in schools includes various activities, including competitions, grand tabligh, seminars, and general stadiums. The goal of each of these exercises is to help pupils develop their religious character. In addition, efforts are made to ensure that all students can participate in the celebrations of major Islamic holidays, such as the Prophet's Birthday and Muharram.

3.1.2. Facilitating the Use of Religious Character Education to Develop Outstanding and Honest Student Characteristics

The system or program put in place is the most helpful item. Mrs. S did this interview on March 2, 2025. The system developed at Madrasah Tsanawiyah is the core of all strategies implemented. Therefore, the success of a plan is highly dependent on the underlying system.

Developing religious character characteristics greatly benefits from the collaboration of all teachers. Teachers are the leaders who are crucial to success in learning activities and bolstering these ideals. According to Saleh, without the assistance of qualified teachers, no aspect of education will maximize the advantages of students' learning experiences.

The conducive environment at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid provides a green and beautiful nuance. With a calm atmosphere and surrounded by trees and a large school area, students can do their activities better. The facilities that are offered also contribute to the learning process. In this context, facilities and infrastructure play a role in shaping students' religious character.

3.1.3. Inhibiting Factors in Implementing Religious Character Education in Shaping Excellent and Integrity-based Student Personalities

The inhibiting factors teachers feel at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid are closely related to environmental conditions and students' educational backgrounds. The results of the interview above by Mrs. LR as a Islamic religious education teacher, March 5, 2025. This situation certainly affects the learning outcomes that have been implemented in schools.

Time constraints are one of the inhibiting factors in the process of forming students' personalities. Each student has different personal activities and is not always at school. With limited time, the process of forming religious characters is hampered. Lack of attention from both parents also contributes to this problem. They are often too busy with work, so children become less motivated to learn. The interview above was presented by Mrs. S as a Islamic religious education teacher on March 5, 2025, and it has a deep essence.

3.2. Discussion

The implementation of religious character education based on Islamic values at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid plays a significant role in molding the personalities of superior and honest students, according to the discussion that has been conducted [17], [66], [67]. The development of student character, particularly in areas of discipline and responsibility, has benefited from the application of these Islamic values through a variety of routine activities, including congregational prayers, tadarus Al-Qur'an, the practice of praying before and after activities, and the creation of a culture of mutual respect [4], [13], [55]. In order to develop pupils with excellent personalities and integrity, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid implements religious character education. Demonstrated to be beneficial, particularly in raising student accountability and discipline [21].

The findings of this study indicate that religious character education that is consistently implemented can increase students' awareness of carrying out obligations, obeying school regulations, and carrying out tasks and responsibilities with full awareness [39], [68]. In addition to comprehending the principles presented, students also put them into practice in their everyday conduct, both within and outside the classroom [59]. This illustrates how Christian character education effectively molds pupils into honorable, well-behaved, responsible, and disciplined individuals. A structured education system and program, strong teacher collaboration, and teacher behavior as the driving force behind instilling religious values are some of the key elements that support the success of the religious character education implementation at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid. Furthermore, a peaceful, lovely, and accommodating school environment fosters the growth of kids' religious character and makes learning comfortable [69]. The efficacy of this madrasah's religious character education curriculum is reinforced by the complementing elements of adequate educational facilities and an integrated learning system.

Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid has successfully established a religious and educational environment and developed students' character by regularly integrating programs, the environment, teaching staff, and facilities. These students have been disciplined, responsible, independent, honest, and morally upright [18]. To maximize the benefits of religious character education, students can integrate religious principles into their daily lives in the context of the family, society, and school [68], [70].

Various environmental circumstances and student backgrounds hamper the execution of Islamic character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid, time constraints brought on by hectic student activities, and parental neglect. This condition causes the process of forming students' religious personalities not to run optimally, even though various programs and examples have been provided at school [71], [72]. Environmental support, sufficient time, and good cooperation from schools to parents in monitoring students are needed to implement religious character education optimally [27]. Moreover, the solution to these inhibiting factors is through firm teacher guidance, holding various religious activities, and organizing motivational seminars. Furthermore, annual programs such as tabligh akbar, religious competitions, seminars, and celebrations of Islamic holidays are important means of strengthening students' religious character. This activity increases Islamic knowledge and instills the values of cooperation, responsibility, and discipline [72], [73]. Thus, religious character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid takes place in the classroom and is also integrated holistically into various school activities[46]. This shows that religious character education implemented consistently and supported by various parties can shape the personality of students who are superior in academics and have noble character and integrity in everyday life.

With consistent implementation and support from various parties, religious character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid can form students who are not only academically intelligent but also have a religious, disciplined, and responsible personality [74].

The study's results demonstrate how religious character education is incorporated into daily, weekly, and annual events at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid. The technique for imparting religious values includes activities like congregational Dhuha prayers, reciting the Al-Quran, and forming the habit of being courteous. Instilling values like honesty, accountability, and discipline—exhibited by genuine attitudes and behaviors within and outside the classroom—is primarily the teachers' job. Religious character development affects students' social behavior and spiritual understanding. Pupils learn to be more disciplined in performing their tasks, showing respect for others, and having the courage to own up to their mistakes.

Strong emotional and spiritual intelligence are also fostered by religiously based education, and these qualities are crucial for overcoming the difficulties of contemporary life. The active participation of all teachers, a supportive madrasah environment, and sufficient support facilities contribute to the program's success. Character education is accepted and genuinely embodied in students' everyday lives because formal, informal, and institutional cultures collaborate. This emphasizes how crucial it is to approach religiously orientated character education holistically. However, this investigation also discovered several drawbacks. These include the pupils' diverse backgrounds, their limited free time, and some parents' lack of support. Because of these factors, internalizing religious values may not always proceed as smoothly. Therefore, madrasahs and families must work together to establish a conducive environment overall.

This finding also contributes to the body of knowledge on character education by highlighting how crucial it is for formal education and dorm life to work together to create strong, long-lasting character traits. Because it can integrate a strong value system with the formal education system, the setting of contemporary Islamic boarding schools like Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid could serve as a model for other educational establishments. This adds something fresh to the research on religious character education in institutions. Additionally, this study found barriers that were not extensively covered in previous research, including disparities in the students' backgrounds, low parental participation, and time restraints brought on by the students' hectic schedules. This demonstrates the need for all-encompassing assistance, including cooperation between the madrasah and parents, to execute religious character education. It is necessary to consistently bolster initiatives like guardian counseling, student coaching, and teacher training.

The study's findings can generally be applied to other Islamic educational institutions with comparable institutional structures and cultures. The new value of this study is the distinctiveness of the integrative method that blends aspects of the Islamic boarding school culture, habits, role models, and curriculum. As a result, this study not only supports the findings of other studies but also provides a more comprehensive, adaptable method that may be used in other madrasas situated in Islamic boarding schools. The study concludes that a contextual and long-lasting approach to religious character education is required. It is advised that more research be done to examine how religious character education affects students' academic performance and how religious values might be included in the curriculum across topic areas. With some adjustments based on the features of other Indonesian educational institutions, the successful implementation model at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid can be duplicated.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the study results, it can be concluded that implementing religious character education based on Islamic values at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid plays an important role in forming students' personalities with integrity, discipline, and noble character. Through routine activities such as congregational prayer, Al-Qur'an recitation, daily prayers, and the habit of mutual respect, students can internalize Islamic values in their daily lives. The implementation of religious character education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Nurul Jadid has been proven to have a positive influence in forming students who have good morals, are disciplined, and are responsible. Through routine religious activities and teacher role models, students are accustomed to applying Islamic values daily. Support from a conducive school environment and targeted programs are the main supporting factors, although obstacles such as differences in student backgrounds and lack of parental attention remain. Therefore, closer cooperation is needed between schools, teachers, and families so students' religious character can be optimized. A structured education system, cooperation between teachers, a conducive school environment, and integration between programs and available facilities support the success of these students. However, several obstacles, such as diverse student backgrounds and lack of parental support, affect the optimization of religious character formation. Therefore, solutions such as consistent mentoring from teachers and parental involvement are needed to achieve the goals of religious character education optimally.

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