

## THE PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGY IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CHARACTER: (A Case Study at Sma it Assalam Islamic School)

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### Abstract

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The purpose of this research is to analyze the planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation carried out by the principal together with stakeholders in developing students' character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School. This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The subjects of the study are the principal and four teachers at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School. Data collection techniques include interviews, documentation, and observation. The conclusion of this study is that the principal of SMA IT Assalam Islamic School has designed and implemented a collaborative strategy for character development, which includes the integration of values such as discipline, honesty, and hard work into the curriculum and extracurricular activities. By involving parents and the school committee, and applying fair disciplinary policies, the principal has successfully established a strong foundation for students' character formation. Although most students have successfully adopted these values, challenges remain regarding inconsistency among certain students. Systematic supervision and evaluations involving stakeholders demonstrate the success of the program, although continuous improvements are being made to achieve greater consistency and sustainable character development. The findings imply the importance of planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation that involve all stakeholders for effective character development. Consistency of values between home and school, along with ongoing evaluation, is essential for the program's effectiveness..

**Keywords:** Strategy, School Principal, Development Of Students' Character

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## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the character and culture of a nation. Its function is not merely limited to enhancing human skills but is also aligned with Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 3, which emphasizes that the goal of national education is to develop students' potential and shape the character and civilization of the nation in order to enhance collective intelligence. Unfortunately, in practice, most educational institutions tend to focus only on the development of intellectual intelligence (IQ) and pay less attention to emotional intelligence (EQ).

Our education system is overly focused on academic achievements and intellectual intelligence (IQ), often neglecting aspects of emotional intelligence. From elementary schools to universities, it is rare to find education that teaches values such as integrity, honesty, commitment, vision, creativity, mental resilience, wisdom, justice, trustworthiness, self-control, or synergy — values that are vitally important. Ironically, this condition contributes to deviant behaviors such as corruption among officials or civil

servants, as reported recently by the mass media. Additionally, at the secondary education level, problems such as drug abuse, promiscuity, and brawls among students are still prevalent. These are clear examples of the impact of weak character education in schools on students.

The success of a school is not determined solely by exam scores, achievement indicators, or the characteristics of an effective school. Rather, a school's effectiveness is evident when it becomes a place where students find joy, overcome challenges, and feel satisfied with the learning process. This approach highlights the importance of school culture, where building a "learning community" becomes the key to success, achievable only through the creation of a positive school culture.

The position of a principal is special because they are responsible for managing formal educational institutions that shape the future of students (Mulyasa, 2022). Principals play a significant role in the development of students' abilities, including character formation. Good character requires serious and continuous practice. Although humans may possess innate character traits, these can be changed through persistent struggle and training.

Building good habits is often difficult, despite the internal drive to do good. Character change is a struggle that demands constant practice. If negative impulses are left unchecked, the desire to do good can be pushed aside, leading to disorder. Religion stresses the importance of goodness, and the challenge lies in how individuals can enhance their positive traits while minimizing the negative ones — a continuous effort.

Today's education places greater emphasis on knowledge and intelligence, but less on character development, which actually requires more attention. Whether consciously or not, this imbalance affects an individual's self-perception and worldview, eventually reflected in daily behavior (Indrastoeti, 2016).

Character education is crucial for strengthening students' morals and virtues. Expertise in scientific fields alone is not sufficient without a strong foundation of morals and character (Ali, 2018). Its primary goal is to ensure that students, when interacting in society, do not misuse the knowledge gained through education. The desire to build a democratic nation free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism, and respectful of the law, is the aspiration in national and societal life.

Although national unity and progress are ideal, the reality often shows otherwise. Conflicts and riots occur in various regions, between community groups and between citizens and the government. Regionalism and strong primordial sentiments pose a threat to national unity (Putri et al., 2023). Corruption, collusion, and nepotism practices are still widespread, eroding public trust in leaders and institutions. Democracy, once fought for, has been distorted into chaos and anarchy. Noble national values such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and consensus-based deliberation are increasingly eroded in social, political, and national life.

Among students, a worrying decline in morality is clearly visible. Norm-violating behaviors, ranging from minor to serious offenses, are rampant. Cheating during exams is still common, and the desire to pass exams easily without hard work encourages students to seek unethical ways to get answers. Attempts to obtain leaked answer keys, sometimes institutionalized by school principals and teachers, are on the rise (Ningrum, 2018). According to Handayani et al. (2020), such negative behavior indicates a serious character weakness in students, largely due to the lack of character-building efforts in schools and unsupportive environments.

To realize character education as mandated in the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN), the concept is already embedded in the functions and goals of national education. National education aims to develop students into individuals who

are faithful, pious to God Almighty, noble in character, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and responsible citizens who uphold democracy (Alinurdin, 2020).

Based on the explanations above, character education is not merely about distinguishing right from wrong. It is a process of cultivating good habits so that students can act and behave according to values that have become an integral part of their personalities. These values must be instilled in every student until they become inseparable from the school culture.

Character education draws on various sources, as explained by Al-Tabany (2017), namely religion, Pancasila, culture, and the goals of national education. These include values such as religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, nationalism, patriotism, appreciation of achievement, friendliness/communication skills, love of peace, fondness for reading, environmental awareness, social concern, and responsibility.

Several studies discussing principals' strategies for developing student character have produced varied findings. For example, research by Widodo (2018) on the principal's strategy for character education development in elementary schools found barriers such as students' bad habits, limited teacher supervision, and the negative influence of mass media. Similarly, research by Kamaruddin et al. (2016) titled "Principal's Strategies in Implementing Character Education at State Senior High School 1 Julok" found that some teachers still use traditional teaching methods, including outdated techniques, tools, and media. Teachers also often hesitate to express their needs and challenges during the teaching process. To address this, the principal organized meetings with the teachers, both regularly and as needed.

Further research by Mustajib & Ansori (2021), titled "Principal's Leadership Strategies in Implementing Character Education for Students (Study at SMK Bhakti Mulia Pare)," found that the main obstacle in implementing character education at SMK Bhakti Mulia was human resources (HR). Differences in background, parenting styles, and living environments significantly impacted the character education process at the school.

SMA IT Assalam Islamic School in Jeunieb District is committed to instilling Islamic values and superior character traits in its students. However, several challenges affect the effectiveness of character formation, especially in aspects such as discipline, honesty, hard work, respect for educators, neatness, and politeness. Preliminary observations reveal the following gaps:

1. **Discipline:** Although discipline is a key character trait expected from students, many still come late to class or fail to adhere to school schedules. For instance, some students do not return promptly after breaks or miss assignment deadlines, showing a discrepancy between intended values and real behaviors.
2. **Honesty:** Despite the emphasis on honesty, instances of cheating during exams or dishonesty in task completion still occur. Some students collaborate improperly during exams, indicating a lack of integrity.
3. **Hard Work:** Hard work is essential for academic and personal success, yet some students lack motivation, procrastinate, and prefer playing to doing homework, reflecting a lack of dedication.
4. **Respect for Educators:** Some students display disrespectful behavior towards teachers, such as ignoring instructions during lessons, showing a lack of appreciation for educators' roles.
5. **Neatness and Politeness:** Despite established rules on dress codes and manners, some students wear untidy uniforms or use impolite language when speaking with peers and teachers, indicating a shortfall in the application of these values.

These phenomena reveal a gap between the goals of character education and students' real behaviors, requiring further study to understand the root causes and find effective solutions. However, in-depth research into the factors affecting the less-than-optimal application of character education remains limited. Areas like the role of school environment, teaching methods, and parental involvement need more exploration, as well as students' perceptions of character values and their application outside school.

While many studies have explored principals' strategies for developing student character, gaps remain. Most research tends to focus only on one or two aspects, such as learning, habituation, or modeling. Yet, character development is a complex process requiring a comprehensive approach. Therefore, further research is needed to comprehensively examine principals' strategies for developing student character.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach. The study was conducted at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School, located at Jln. Banda Aceh Medan Km. 192, Blang Mee Barat, Jeunib District, Bireuen Regency, Aceh Province. The research was carried out from September 2024 to November 2024. The subjects of the study were the principal and teachers. Data collection techniques included interviews, documentation, and observation. The data analysis technique used in this study follows Moleong (2017), which involves data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Principal's Planning in Developing Students' Character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School**

The planning undertaken by the principal of SMA IT Assalam Islamic School in developing students' character emphasizes a collaborative and integrative approach. The principal believes that character development is not solely an individual responsibility but requires synergy among all stakeholders, including teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee. This approach aims to create an educational environment that supports the holistic formation of students' character, both inside and outside the classroom.

The planning strategy begins with the integration of character values such as discipline, honesty, and hard work into the learning curriculum. Each subject is designed not only to deliver academic content but also to explicitly embed character education. Furthermore, extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, student organizations, and religious programs serve as platforms for students to practice these values in real-life contexts. The principal also collaborates with teachers to ensure that these values are upheld in daily interactions within the school environment.

The principal actively involves stakeholders, especially parents and the school committee, in the planning and monitoring of character value implementation. Through regular meeting forums, the principal shares the school's vision and mission and solicits input from parents on the best ways to support character development at home. This approach strengthens collaboration between the school and families, ensuring consistency in teaching character values both at school and at home.

Additionally, providing supportive learning facilities is part of the principal's planning. Comfortable classrooms, a well-equipped library, and conducive discussion spaces are provided to support student learning. The principal also ensures that the physical school environment reflects the culture of discipline and hard work expected of students.

The results of this strategic planning are reflected in the school environment, where character values are well implemented. However, challenges remain, such as the difficulty in consistently applying these values in daily life. Therefore, the principal regularly evaluates the planning process and involves teachers in addressing existing shortcomings.

This research is supported by a study conducted by Yanti et al. (2024), which emphasizes the importance of character education planning based on local wisdom within School-Based Management (SBM) and the 2013 Curriculum. In SBM, principals play a crucial role in integrating traditional values into the curriculum and school activities to systematically and sustainably build students' character. This approach ensures that character values are not only taught theoretically but are also practically internalized.

Research by Leon (2023) also supports these findings, revealing that principals play a vital role in setting policies that guide and supervise character education. In planning to develop students' leadership character, principals contribute significantly to character development within the school environment.

Overall, the principal's collaborative planning with stakeholders at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School serves as a fundamental foundation for creating an educational environment that prioritizes both academic achievement and character development, successfully shaping students who are ready to face future challenges.

### **Principal's Implementation in Developing Students' Character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School**

The principal's implementation at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School in developing students' character highlights a collaborative, strategic, and integrative approach. The principal views his role not merely as an administrator but also as a key facilitator in instilling character values such as discipline, honesty, and hard work. This implementation involves teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee as partners in the character education process.

The implementation strategy begins with integrating character values into the learning curriculum. Each subject is designed not only to deliver academic content but also to teach character values both explicitly and implicitly. The principal collaborates with teachers to ensure these values are conveyed consistently through contextual and relevant teaching methods. Extracurricular activities, including sports, arts, student organizations, and religious programs, serve as practical arenas for students to apply these values.

Managing the school culture is also a crucial part of this implementation. The principal ensures that discipline policies are applied fairly and consistently throughout the school environment. Reward and warning systems are designed to encourage students to understand the consequences of their actions and to appreciate hard work. Daily interactions among the principal, teachers, and staff exemplify behaviors that reflect character values, creating a conducive environment for character building.

The principal has also developed an effective monitoring system to oversee the application of character values. Classroom observations, regular evaluations, and feedback collection from students, teachers, and parents are conducted to assess the program's effectiveness. The results are used to provide constructive feedback to teachers and students and to refine existing strategies.

The implementation has shown positive developments, with character values being effectively applied in the school environment. Nevertheless, challenges remain, such as inconsistencies in applying these values. To address this, the school continuously evaluates its strategies and engages all stakeholders in ongoing improvements.

According to research by Nurhandayani et al. (2024), during implementation, principals act as administrators to enhance school performance based on plans, visions, missions, and the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP). Two curricula are applied: the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum, supporting vision and mission through routines, extracurriculars, collaborative learning, and teacher working groups.

Leon (2023) also found that principals, as educational leaders, must maximize academic supervision evaluations to foster positive learning behaviors, while direct engagement with students and motivational strategies are effective for character building. Rolisa & Prasasti (2022) emphasize the principal's role as a manager in policymaking and program supervision, with collaboration among teachers and parents being key to success.

In conclusion, the principal's strategic, structured, and collaborative approach at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School has successfully created an educational environment conducive to both academic excellence and strong character formation.

### **Principal's Supervision in Implementing Character Education at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School**

The principal's supervision at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School in implementing character education highlights a collaborative and systematic approach. The principal views supervision not merely as an evaluation tool but as a means to strengthen the consistent and sustainable application of character values throughout the school environment.

Supervision strategies begin with developing relevant monitoring instruments, such as student discipline records, extracurricular activity reports, and teacher performance evaluations. These tools are designed to monitor the implementation of character values like discipline, honesty, and responsibility in both learning activities and daily life. The principal routinely reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of these instruments to ensure alignment with the school's character education goals.

In addition to developing instruments, the principal conducts direct classroom and school activity observations to monitor character value implementation. Observations serve as a basis for providing constructive feedback to teachers and students, aiming at solution-oriented improvements.

The principal also actively involves parents and the school committee in the supervision process. Through regular meetings, discussions are held regarding students' academic and character development. This collaboration aims to create consistency between the values taught at school and those reinforced at home, enhancing the effectiveness of character formation.

Supervision is not limited to evaluation but extends to student guidance. When issues arise, such as disciplinary violations or a lack of honesty, the principal prefers educational approaches such as counseling, re-teaching, or discussions involving students and parents. This approach demonstrates the principal's commitment to creating a supportive environment for holistic character development.

The results of supervision have been positive, with values like discipline and responsibility well-embedded in the school environment. Nonetheless, challenges such as inconsistent application of values remain, prompting ongoing evaluations and the search for more effective strategies.

Research by Yanti et al. (2024) outlines that supervision aims to ensure teacher activities align with plans and to monitor student attitude, ability, and skill development through standard setting, evaluation, and corrective action. Similarly, Sripurwati et al. (2024) found that principals actively develop internal and external training programs and apply clinical supervision through direct classroom observations.

Ajmain & Marzuki (2019) emphasize the crucial roles of principals and teachers in instilling character values through learning, extracurricular activities, and daily routines. Rijal et al. (2024) also highlight the importance of internal and external supervision in supporting character education.

In conclusion, the principal's collaborative and structured supervision at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School has been key to ensuring the success of character education programs, helping foster students who are academically strong and have robust character traits.

### **Principal's Evaluation in Developing Students' Character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School**

The evaluation conducted by the principal of SMA IT Assalam Islamic School in developing students' character reflects a measurable and collaborative approach. The principal understands that character development requires continuous monitoring, where evaluation results are used to improve program effectiveness. The evaluation involves all stakeholders, including teachers, staff, students, and parents, aiming to create continuity between the values taught at school and those practiced at home.

Evaluations assess the impact of character development programs on aspects such as discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. Various methods are employed, including direct observations, feedback from teachers and parents, and regular surveys. Evaluation results have shown positive outcomes, demonstrating success in forming the desired attitudes and behaviors. The principal regularly holds meetings with educators to discuss evaluation findings and devise improvement strategies to optimize program impact.

Relevant instruments such as student development reports, classroom observations, and discipline records are utilized not only to measure success but also to identify challenges, such as gaps between taught values and students' actual behaviors. The principal works collaboratively with teachers and parents to provide solutions, including student counseling or re-teaching of insufficiently understood values.

Involving stakeholders in the evaluation process is key to ensuring program success. Parent meetings are held to discuss students' progress and to find ways to support character development at home, strengthening the consistency of value application in students' daily lives.

The evaluation findings also highlight the importance of ongoing program refinement. Although the program has been effective, challenges like behavioral inconsistencies remain, necessitating continued innovation and reinforcement in the application of character values.

Overall, the evaluation conducted by the principal of SMA IT Assalam Islamic School demonstrates a strong commitment to students' character development. With a structured and collaborative approach, the school has not only succeeded in improving academic quality but also in shaping a generation with strong personal character, creating a holistic educational environment.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion in the previous chapter, the following conclusions are drawn in accordance with the research questions:

1. The principal's planning in developing students' character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School emphasizes a collaborative approach by involving teachers, staff, parents, and the school committee. Character values are integrated into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and daily interactions. Faculty support also plays an important role in creating a conducive environment. Although the implementation has been running well, challenges remain, thus regular evaluations

- are continuously carried out to ensure the program's effectiveness and continuous improvement in character development.
2. The principal's implementation in developing students' character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School is carried out through a collaborative, strategic, and integrative approach. Character values are embedded into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and school culture, with the principal serving as the main facilitator. Regular supervision and evaluations are conducted to ensure the program's effectiveness, although challenges in consistency still exist. Overall, the program has shown positive results, and continuous improvement efforts are made through the involvement of all stakeholders to enhance sustainable character development.
  3. The principal's supervision in developing students' character at SMA IT Assalam Islamic School is conducted collaboratively and systematically, involving teachers, staff, students, and parents. Through supervision instruments, direct observations, and regular evaluations, the principal ensures that character values are applied consistently. The approach focuses not only on evaluation but also on guidance by providing educational solutions to emerging issues. Although there are challenges in maintaining consistency, the principal continually strives to improve the effectiveness of supervision strategies to ensure that character education runs more optimally.
  4. The evaluation conducted by the principal of SMA IT Assalam Islamic School in developing students' character shows a systematic and collaborative approach. Through various methods such as observations, feedback, and surveys, the evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the program in shaping discipline, responsibility, and religiousness. The results indicate positive impacts, although challenges such as behavioral inconsistency remain. Collaboration with teachers and parents is key to strengthening character values, while program refinements are continuously made to optimize and sustain the implementation of character values within the school environment.

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