

# Character Education Transformation: Awakening the Role of Ulama through the Ulama Cadre Student Standard Program

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## Abstract

This research focuses on the effectiveness of the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program in shaping the character of students at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari. The research method used is qualitative research with a case study approach, which involves in-depth interviews, observations, and the collection of documents related to the SSKU program. Through data analysis conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive techniques, the study found that the SSKU program successfully instilled religious and social values in students. A thorough evaluation showed that students' involvement in religious activities increased, and they actively led social events such as tahlil and yasin. Students also report increased self-confidence and social skills, signaling the program's positive impact on the formation of the character of the clerics. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of integration between theory, practice, and example in religious education, which can be used as a model for other educational institutions that want to develop students' character through a scholar-based approach. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the development of character education policies in Indonesia's context of Islamic education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Character education in the context of Islamic education has become an increasingly urgent issue amid today's social dynamics and global challenges (Chanifah et al., 2021; Tohri et al., 2022; Chuanchen & Zaini, 2023). With the increasing moral and ethical challenges faced by the younger generation (Kooli, 2023; Flores-Viva & García-Peñalvo, 2023; Yan et al., 2024), the implications of the lack of character education can be seen in increasingly worrying social behaviors (Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Arora et al., 2021; Almaiah et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, this phenomenon can be seen through the increase in the number of juvenile delinquents (Baumer et al., 2021; Svensson & Oberwittler, 2021; Holili et al., 2024), which reflects the urgent need to form individuals who are not only academically educated but also have noble character (Isnaini et al., 2020; Van Horne & Rakedzon, 2024; Memon et al., 2024). In this context, the formation of the character of ulama is an important focus that must be given serious attention because ulama are expected to play a role in directing society towards better morals (Hermawan & Asnawi, 2023; Damayanti et al., 2023; Kharisma, 2024). Therefore, this research focuses on the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari as a strategic effort in fostering students' character and moral integrity.

The phenomenon found in the field shows challenges in implementing the SSKU program, although this program has been running with clear goals, there is a gap between expectations and reality in the field. Students expected to be role models in society often still show behavior that is not aligned with the religious values taught. This is a particular concern, considering the importance of moral integrity and the social context that today's young generation faces. This study seeks to identify various factors that affect the effectiveness of the SSKU program, as well as how its implementation can encourage improvement in student character. Using an analytical and descriptive approach, this study is expected to provide comprehensive insights into learning conditions in madrasas and equip students with the proper understanding and trajectory to develop into a society with character.

A literature review shows that several previous studies touched on the theme of character education in the context of Islamic education. For example, research by Panadero & Lipnevich (2022) revealed that a key component in successful character education is integrating models, practices, and feedback. Meanwhile, Tirri et al. (2021) emphasize the need for exemplary education students. Huda et al. (2020) also stated that the extrapola approach, Incentives in extracurricular activities, can increase the effectiveness of character education. However, the studies did not go into depth about specific programming, such as SSKU, and its impact on student character. This gap signals the need for further research to explore how these specific programs can be applied and evaluated in the context of madrasas.

This research gap is important to identify because although the existing literature provides a general understanding of character education, not many studies focus on studying programs such as SSKU in real contexts in Indonesia. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the effectiveness of the SSKU program and its impact on the formation of the character of scholars. This provides an opportunity to produce a more comprehensive and applicable understanding for the development of educational programs in other madrasas, which are also oriented towards character formation in accordance with modern society's demands.

The contribution of novelty in this study lies in applying assessment and evaluation models that combine character education theory with hands-on practice in the SSKU program. This research not only focuses on measuring academic aspects, but also assesses how student involvement in social and religious activities can indicate the success of character education. Thus, this research offers a new perspective in developing educational programs that have not been explored in depth. This research has the potential to provide innovative methods that involve the active participation of students in their education, as well as a valuable reference for future character education policies and practices.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the SSKU program in shaping the character of students at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari. This research seeks to answer questions about how the program is implemented and its impact on the formation of the character of ulama. The results of this study will not only provide insights for the development of education in the madrasah and contribute to the practice of character education in a broader context. By identifying the successes and challenges in implementing the SSKU program, this study can provide valuable recommendations for developing more effective programs in the future.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The type of research used in this study is qualitative research with a case study approach. The qualitative method is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and changes in the characters of students who participate in the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari. This approach is more appropriate compared to quantitative methods that are usually more focused on statistical measurement and analysis, as this study aims to detail how the program contributes to character formation and explore the more profound influence of the students' learning experience. Qualitative research also allows researchers to interact directly with subjects and obtain richer data through interviews, observations, and documentation (Strijker et al., 2020; Stahl & King, 2020; Renjith et al., 2021).

For data collection techniques, this research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari, located in Malang Regency. The selection of this location is based on the reputation of the madrasah as an institution that consistently implements the SSKU program and is committed to character education. The respondents in this study consisted of 12 people, including the head of the madrasah, the deputy head of curriculum, the SSKU program coordinator, and several students who were directly involved in the program.

This number of respondents was selected to obtain an adequate variety of views on the program's effectiveness and to achieve the depth of information needed to support the research objectives. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation during learning activities, and documents relevant to the SSKU program. The following table shows the coding for the interviewees and their roles in the study.

**Table 1. Coding for Resource Persons**

Interview Code	Sources	Role
KW1	Head of Madrasah	Determining the policy and vision of the madrasah
KW2	Deputy Head	Curriculum development
KW3	Student	SSKU program participants
KW4	Coordinator of the SSKU	Programme implementer
KW5	SSKU Trainer	Teachers and student advisors
KW6	Student	SSKU program participants
KW7	Deputy Head	Collection of evaluation data
KW8	Program Head	Program supervision and evaluation
KW9	Student	SSKU program participants

Data analysis is carried out using interactive analysis techniques adopted from Miles and Huberman (Ridwan et al., 2022; Syaharuddin et al., 2022; Harefa et al., 2022), which includes three main stages: data collection, data reduction, and data presentation. Data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation is collected and recorded in the first stage. Furthermore, data reduction is carried out by grouping and summarizing relevant information for the focus of the research. It aims to find patterns and themes that emerge from the data. Finally, the data is presented as a narrative that answers the research question, where each identified theme is further analyzed and connected to previous theories and studies. This approach not only ensures that the data collected is analyzed in depth, but also provides a clear picture of the effectiveness of the SSKU program in shaping student character.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Characteristics of Ulama Who Want to Be Realized

This study found that the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari prioritizes the formation of the character of scholars who have a deep understanding of Islam Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah, and can love and contribute to society. This character development show is not only directed at the scientific aspect, but also emphasizes moral integrity and social interaction skills.

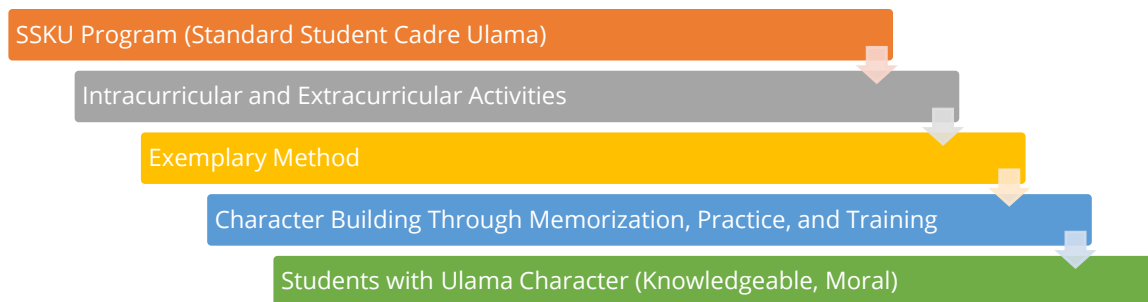
The observation results show that students are actively involved in religious activities in the madrasah, such as congregational prayers and social activities. This illustrates that the characteristics of the scholars formed through the SSKU program are truly internalized in daily practice. In religious habituation activities, students were seen carrying out prayers on time and participating in discussions about Islamic values

As the Head of the Madrasah stated, "We want our students not only to know about religion, but also how to implement it in life. They must understand their role in society" (KW1). This statement shows the importance of understanding religious values as the basis for the expected character of scholars. This was then strengthened by the Waka Curriculum, which stated, "Cadres of ulama must be role models, both in morals and knowledge. That is what we always emphasize in this program" (KW2). Students also feel this impact; One of the students said, "I feel that I understand better that love for the homeland is part of our faith. That makes me more proud to be part of this madrasah" (KW3).

The interview results confirmed Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari's commitment to forming the character of scholars who have religious knowledge and can also apply it in daily life. A deep understanding of religious values is an important foundation for giving birth to a generation aware of its social role. In addition, the emphasis on exemplary morals and science shows that madrassas strive to prepare students as societal role models. The response of students who realize that love of the homeland is part of faith underscores the importance of integration between religious values and nationalism, increasing their sense of pride in being part of this educational institution.

### **The Process of Character Formation of Ulama**

The findings show that the process of forming the character of ulama at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari is carried out systematically through activities that prioritize exemplary and habituation methods. The observation results show that in learning activities, students are taught not only theory but also hands-on practice. Students engage in sharia animal slaughter simulations and pilgrimages to the tombs of scholars, which not only teach practical skills but also instill strong Islamic values in them. This is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Character Formation Process**

Figure 1. Regarding the flow of the character formation process at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif, it can be used to present the steps in the formation of the character of the ulama. This diagram visually illustrates how the SSKU program, intracurricular and extracurricular activities, and exemplary methods contribute to the development of students' character, creating a synergy between theory and practice, which is expected to produce a cadre of scholars with noble character and knowledge. This chart will be an effective tool in understanding the process applied in character formation in madrasas.

This is also reinforced by the statement delivered by the SSKU Program Coordinator, "The method we use is instilling values through practice. We teach students not only to know theories, but also to apply them in daily life" (KW4). The SSKU coach added, "We do character development through example. All teachers must be a real example for students in discipline and worship practice" (KW5). The importance of exemplary character education is interpreted as an effort to provide a model that students can follow in their lives.

The results of this interview highlight the effectiveness of the methodology applied in the SSKU program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari, which emphasizes the inculcation of values through hands-on practice. With a learning direction that focuses on applying theory in everyday life, students are taught about the cognitive aspects of religious science and how to apply it in a social context. In addition, exemplary teachers are a key aspect of character education, where educators are expected to provide real examples of discipline and worship practices. This not only encourages students to internalize the values taught but also motivates them to become individuals of good character and be able to display the expected behavior in society. This synergy between theory, practice, and example further strengthens the process of forming the character of scholars with integrity and responsibility.

## **The Effectiveness of the Implementation of the Ulama Cadre Student Standard Program in Shaping Student Character**

The SSKU program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari is considered adequate according to evaluations that are always carried out through written, practical, and memorization assessments. The observation results showed high involvement in students' attendance at religious events. Students were seen actively leading and carrying out tahlil and yasin activities, which shows that the character of the ulama formed through the SSKU program has had a real and positive impact on their social life.

As the Deputy Head of Madrasah for curriculum states, "We assess students based on their knowledge, practices they do, and memorization that has been done. This is essential to determine how far their character is formed" (KW7). It shows how a thorough evaluation is conducted to ensure the program's success.

The head of the SSKU program added, "We conduct regular evaluations, and the results show significant improvements. Most students can achieve good grades, although there is room for improvement" (KW8). This highlights the importance of continuous evaluation in assessing the program's effectiveness.

One form of effectiveness that students feel is the changes that occur in them. One student reveals, "Since joining this program, I feel more confident speaking in public and leading religious events. It's an invaluable experience" (KW9). This provides evidence that SSKU programs improve not only religious knowledge but also students' social and leadership skills.

The results of this interview indicate that a thorough evaluation is a crucial component in the SSKU program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari. An integrated assessment process, which includes measuring knowledge, practice, and memorization, ensures that students are assessed not only on intellectual ability but also on their character and behavior. This reflects the madrasah's commitment to forming holistic students, where every aspect of learning is interconnected and supports each other. The research findings from this study can be summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Research Findings**

No	Research Focus	Research Findings
1	Characteristics of Ulama to be realized	This research reveals that the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari has been designed to form the character of scholars who have a strong understanding of Islam Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah, as well as love their homeland through patriotism and nationalism. This program seeks to develop a cadre of moderate scholars who adhere to noble values and are open to new values to achieve the goals of Islam, wasathiyah or rahmatan lil alamin.
2	The process of forming the character of the ulama	The formation of the character of ulama at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari began with the SKU (Ubudiyah Proficiency Requirements) program, which has been running since 1998 and is now adjusted to SSKU. This program includes coaching through memorization, worship practices, and leadership training in religious and social activities. The program also prioritizes the exemplary method (uswah), although its implementation is not optimal. The findings show that the example of teachers in time discipline and congregational worship practices is important to strengthen students' character. The SSKU coach also revealed the importance of leadership training for students to be ready to play a role in society.
3	The effectiveness of the implementation of the Ulama Cadre Student Standards program in shaping student character	The SSKU program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari is considered adequate based on continuous evaluation conducted by the madrasah. The assessment includes written, practical, and memorized assessments according to the educational objectives. Each student is graded on a grade range of A to C, and the program is evaluated annually to maintain its relevance and effectiveness. The head of the SSKU program said that most students achieved a sufficient assessment or maqbul as a minimum achievement, although not all achieved a perfect predicate. The results of interviews with students also showed positive changes in themselves. Students feel more skilled in memorization and dare to convey knowledge to the community. They are also trained to conduct religious events such as tahlil and yasin, which are helpful when involved in activities in the community.

Each of the research findings obtained is interrelated, showing that the formation of the character of ulama through the SSKU program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari is carried out consistently and in a structured manner. First, the desired characteristics of ulama reflect the commitment of the madrasah to produce students who not only master religious knowledge but also contribute positively to society. Through interview excerpts and narrative descriptions, it is clear that the interviewees, both madrasah heads and students, agreed on the importance of moral and spiritual integrity in forming the character of the ulama.

Second, building the character of scholars, which is carried out systematically by prioritizing exemplary methods and direct practice, shows the importance of collaboration between teachers and students. Evidence from student experiences and observations during madrasah activities confirms the meaning of teachers' exemplary work, which is very influential in the learning process. Third, the effectiveness of implementing the SSKU program, which is measured through results and evaluations, sharpens the argument that its success is inseparable from students' active participation and the encouragement provided by teachers. Behavior transformation, improvement of students' abilities, and participation in community activities are the parameters of its success.

## Discussion

The discussion of the results of this study revealed that the formation of the character of ulama through the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari is effective in instilling religious, social, and moral integrity values in students. Previous research, such as that discussed by Gamage et al. (2021), shows that successful character education requires a holistic approach and involves students' active involvement in social activities rather than just theoretical learning in the classroom. This finding aligns with a study by Emilia et al. (2023), which states that teacher exemplary plays a crucial role in the character education process, where teachers' actions directly influence students to imitate the expected positive behavior.

Furthermore, research by Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024) emphasizes the relevance of extracurricular activities as an important means of internalizing Islamic values, which is also a highlight in this study. The involvement of students in religious events, such as tahlil and yasin, shows that the learning process stops at the delivery of theories and is expected to be applied in real practice that strengthens the character of responsible and integrity scholars. Thus, the SSKU program not only functions as a formal education curriculum but also as a model for shaping the young generation, who can positively impact society based on moderate and inclusive Islamic values.

The theoretical and practical contribution of the results of this research lies in providing a deeper insight into the approach to character education in the context of Islamic education, primarily through the Ulama Cadre Student Standards (SSKU) program at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari. Theoretically, this study strengthens the argument that integrating teacher theory, practice, and example is the key to success in shaping the character of scholars with integrity and responsibility, which aligns with the theory of character education proposed by Lickona and Berkowitz.

Practically, the results of this study guide educational institutions in implementing effective character education programs, emphasizing students' active involvement in social and religious activities and the need for continuous evaluation to improve the quality of learning. Thus, this research can be used as a model for developing educational programs in other madrasas that aim to produce a young generation who are not only intelligent in religious science but also able to contribute positively to the broader community.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examines the effectiveness of the Cadre Ulama Student Standards (SSKU) program in shaping the character of students at Madrasah Aliyah Almaarif Singosari. Based on the findings, the program has succeeded in instilling religious and social values in students, which is reflected in increased student involvement in religious activities and the development of social and leadership skills. Continuous evaluation is key in measuring the program's success, which assesses academic knowledge and changes in student behavior. The implications of this study show the importance of integration between theory, practice, and example in religious education. These results are a reference for other educational institutions to develop effective character programs prioritizing academic intelligence and students' moral character. This research opens up opportunities for further research on the scholar-based character education model that can be applied in a broader context.

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