

Transformation of Student Character Building through Religious-Based Child-Friendly School Programs: Responding to Challenges and Creating Sustainable Character Education Solutions

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of a religious-based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari and its influence on the development of student character. The research investigates how the integration of religious values, positive discipline policies, and the active involvement of parents and school committees contribute to shaping students' behavior. The study is motivated by the ongoing challenges in character education, particularly the need for a holistic approach that blends academic learning with moral and spiritual development. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the research employs data collection methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis. Key informants include school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and school committee members, providing a comprehensive view of the program's impact. The findings reveal that the SRA program has effectively created a supportive environment for character building, with significant contributions from the school's discipline policies and the involvement of all stakeholders. The program has led to improvements in student behavior, including increased discipline, responsibility, and respect for religious values. This research highlights the importance of integrating character education with religious teachings and demonstrates how collaborative efforts among educators, parents, and the community can foster a well-rounded educational environment. The findings have broader implications for the development of similar programs in other educational contexts, particularly in promoting moral and spiritual growth among students.

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INTRODUCTION

Amid the complexity of social problems faced by the young generation of Indonesia, character education is one of the central issues that are urgent to be discussed (Tohri et al., 2022; Tavares et al., 2022; Solehudin et al., 2023). In recent years, the phenomenon of declining moral quality and student behavior in schools has become more prominent, reflecting the failure to form a generation that is not only intellectually superior, but also has integrity and noble morals (Gamage et al., 2021; Chatters et al., 2022; Mihelič et al., 2023). Various educational policies implemented in schools have not optimally overcome this problem (Ferri et al., 2020; Sari & Nayır, 2020; Putri et al., 2024). One of the approaches now receiving more attention is the implementation of the religious-based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) (Zaini, 2023; Basri et al., 2024; Kharisma, 2024). SRA integrates religious values in teaching and learning activities for shaping the character of students better (Damayanti et al., 2023; Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Montés et al., 2024). The demand for the success of this program is not only in the academic aspect, but furthermore, in creating a school environment that supports the development of noble character. Based on this reality, it is important to explore more deeply how implementing religious-based SRA can affect the formation of students' character and improve the quality of character education in Indonesia.

The phenomenon found in the field shows that although various efforts have been made, implementing the religious-based SRA Program often encounters obstacles. One of the main obstacles is the inconsistency between the designed policies and the increasingly complex realities of student life, including the influence of the social and family environment. This is reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of students that do not fully reflect the religious values taught in schools. Even though schools already have SRA programs, most schools have not been able to guarantee the effectiveness of integrating religious values in students' daily lives (Maftuh, 2023; Hull & Romig, 2021; Magan & Elkhaoudi, 2024). In addition, the diversity of students' social and cultural backgrounds is also an important factor affecting this program's effectiveness. Therefore, this study explores the challenges and opportunities in implementing the religious-based SRA Program and its impact on forming student character in MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari is expected to provide more insight into the successes and obstacles in implementing the program.

A review of the literature on implementing religion-based character education in schools shows a tendency that leads to the importance of integrating religious values to shape students' character. For example, research conducted by Anand et al. (2021) on the influence of religious education on character development in secondary schools shows that integrating religious values can increase student discipline and positive behavior. This study found that religious teaching carried out in a structured and sustainable manner can shape students' character to be more responsive to social norms.

In addition, research by Affolter et al. (2020), which examined religious-based character education programs in Islamic schools, also found that collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community can strengthen the application of moral values taught in schools. However, this study lacks exploration of how more specific religious-based SRA programs can be implemented at the madrasah level and their direct impact on student behavior. Another study by (Arakelyan & Ager, 2021; Spohrer, 2024; Safi'l & Mardiana, 2024) reveals the importance of positive discipline in character education, especially those based on religious values. This study emphasizes the importance of implementing discipline policies that focus not only on punishment but also on fostering students' character.

However, this study has not discussed the implementation of the religious-based SRA Program in junior high schools (MTs), especially in a more in-depth context related to religion's influence on students' character. However, these studies provide an overview of the importance of religion-based education in forming student character. However, no research specifically examines the implementation of religion-based SRA in certain schools and how it affects concrete changes in student behavior. Therefore, this research is important to fill in the gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Although previous research has discussed the importance of religious-based character education and the implementation of favorable discipline policies, there is still a significant gap in the specific assessment of religious-based SRA programs at the madrasah level. Most of the research emphasizes the theoretical aspects of character education or the general influence of religious education, without looking at how applying SRA based on religious values can change student behavior in junior high school. This gap is mainly seen in the lack of research examining the factors affecting the effectiveness of religious-based SRA programs, such as parental involvement, favorable discipline policies, and integrating religious values in students' daily lives. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by digging deeper into how the religious-based SRA Program in MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari is implemented, as well as how it affects the character and behavior of students.

The novelty of this research lies in a more comprehensive approach to understanding the influence of the religious-based SRA Program on the formation of student character in madrasas. This research focuses on integrating religious values in positive disciplines and daily student behavior. This research will introduce a new perspective in examining the implementation of religious-based SRA by assessing how discipline policies, strengthening religious values, and the role of parents and society can contribute to the formation of better student character. In addition, this research will contribute by introducing implementation models that can be adapted by other madrasas facing similar challenges, as well as offering a deeper understanding of how religious values can be applied more effectively in child-friendly school environments. Thus, this research has a high level of novelty because it carries a more detailed and contextual approach and provides a new perspective for developing religious-based character education policies.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the implementation of the religious-based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) in MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari, focusing on its influence on forming students' character, especially in discipline, morals, and integrating religious values in daily life. This study aims to provide a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities in implementing the religious-based SRA program and its impact on student behavior changes in schools. In addition, this research is expected to provide recommendations for religious-based character education policies in other schools, to create an educational environment that supports the development of students' character holistically and sustainably.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type to explore the implementation of the religious-based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) in MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari. The qualitative approach was chosen because the main objective of this study is to deeply understand how SRA programs are run in the field and to explore the experiences and perspectives of various elements involved, such as madrasah heads, teachers, students, parents, and school committees. The case study was chosen as the research method because of its deep focus on a particular location or phenomenon, allowing researchers to explore how religious-based character education policies and practices are explicitly implemented in the madrasah. Compared to quantitative methods that focus more on measuring numbers or statistics, qualitative approaches provide greater space to delve into the meaning and context behind the policies implemented, as well as their impact on the development of students' character (Stahl & King, 2020; Rutakumwa et al., 2020; Lester et al., 2020).

The data collection techniques used in this study involve three primary methods: observation, interview, and documentation (López-Alcarria et al., 2021; Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024; Oduro et al., 2024). Observation was carried out directly at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari to learn daily practices related to the SRA Program, especially in the context of favorable discipline policies, moral habits, and the involvement of parents and school committees. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 resource persons: the Head of the Madrasah, Deputy Head of the Madrasah, SRA Program Coordinator, Religious Teachers, Supervisors, and several students and parents.

Resource persons are selected based on their role in the program's planning, implementation, and evaluation. The documentation collected includes activity reports, school regulations, and character education materials used in the program. The following table shows the coding of the sources used in this study.

Table 1. Coding of Resource Persons Used in Research

Resource Person Code	Description
I_KM_2024	The Head of the Madrasah was interviewed about the Madrasah's vision, mission, and policies regarding implementing religious-based SRA.
I_WKM_2024	The Deputy Head of Madrasah explained the role and policies in implementing positive discipline and the SRA program.
I_KSRA_2024	SRA Program Coordinator, discussing program implementation and student and parent involvement.
I_GA_2024	Religious Teachers provide views on integrating religious values in the SRA program.
I_GP_2024	Supervisor Teachers, discuss the habituation of students' morals and character through routine activities.
I_SKIX_2024	Grade IX students provide perspectives on the impact of the SRA program on their discipline and morals.
I_SKVIII_2024	Grade VIII students discussed their experience participating in the tahfidz program and discipline.
I_KS_2024	The School Committee explained the importance of evaluation and collaboration in supporting the SRA program.
I_Ortu_2024	Parents, provide your views on the role of parents in supporting the implementation of SRA values at home.

The data collected through this interview technique provides a comprehensive picture of the experiences, challenges, and successes experienced by various parties involved in the SRA Program. The selection of representative speakers allows researchers to gain diverse perspectives, from the policy level to practical implementation, and the program's impact on students. The documentation obtained also supports the findings in observations and interviews, providing further context on how the program is run and seen by all components of the school.

This study uses data analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman (Lester et al., 2020; Sanches et al., 2022; Ruwanika & Massyn, 2024), which involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. In the data reduction stage, researchers filter and summarize information obtained from observation and interviews, grouping the data according to the main themes that emerge, such as favorable discipline policies, moral habits, and the role of parents. Furthermore, the summarized data is presented in the form of a more structured narrative, which facilitates a more precise and comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the SRA program.

In the final stage, conclusions are drawn by connecting findings from various data sources to identify emerging patterns or relationships and provide a deeper interpretation of the SRA program's impact and effectiveness. This technique provides flexibility in managing complex qualitative data so that the analysis's results can reflect a richer and more detailed context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section describes the results of research findings obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation related to implementing the religious-based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari. The findings are compiled into several sub-sections that connect the data with the research topic comprehensively and systematically. Each sub-section contains an in-depth analysis, with relevant interview citations as supporting evidence.

Religious-Based SRA Program Policy and Management

Observations at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari shows that the policy of the religious-based SRA Program is highly prioritized in creating a safe environment and supporting student character formation. This policy is evident in school regulations prioritizing positive discipline, respect for children's rights, and strengthening religious values in students' daily lives. Any disciplinary violation is no longer resolved by corporal punishment, but through a more educational and character-building approach. This is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Visualization: Religious-Based Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) Policy Table

Policy Aspects	Description	Impact on Student Character
Positive Discipline Policy	The approach without physical punishment focuses on moral development.	Increase moral awareness and responsibility.
Respect for Children's Rights	Children's rights in the school environment are fulfilled and given a sense of security and comfort.	Forming an attitude of mutual respect and empathy.
Strengthening Religious Values	Integration of religious education in students' daily activities.	Fostering spiritual awareness and discipline.

In an interview with the Head of the Madrasah, he stated that the vision and mission of the Madrasah are very focused on building character based on morals and religious values. He emphasized, "The vision of our madrasah is to form people who have faith, piety, and good morals. Our SRA program is part of that effort, emphasizing education that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also of noble character" (I_KM_2024). This is reinforced by the Deputy Head of Madrasah's statement: "We have developed policies that not only protect children's rights, but also instill religious values and Pancasila in their daily lives" (I_WKM_2024).

The observation results also show that favorable discipline policies are applied consistently, with a coaching program prioritizing the principles of compassion and understanding for students. Students who violate the rules are given guidance regarding the importance of good morals and the relationship between actions and their impact on themselves and others. This aligns with the goals of the SRA Program, which wants to create a learning environment that supports the development of students' character by the values of Pancasila.

This religious-based policy is important in creating an environment conducive to forming students' character. By replacing corporal punishment with an approach based on moral learning, madrassas not only maintain the safety and comfort of children but also instill noble values that underlie the life of the nation and religion. The concept of positive discipline applied in madrasas aligns with the view of Anand et al. (2021), who consider that character education must be based on morals and spirituality, which leads to moral improvement.

The Role of School Residents in the Implementation of the SRA Program

The observation results show close cooperation between all elements of the school in supporting the implementation of the SRA Program. Students, teachers, parents, and school committees actively create an environment that supports the program. The involvement of parents in every school activity is evident through regular meetings that educate parents about their child's development, as well as how they can support the implementation of SRA values at home.

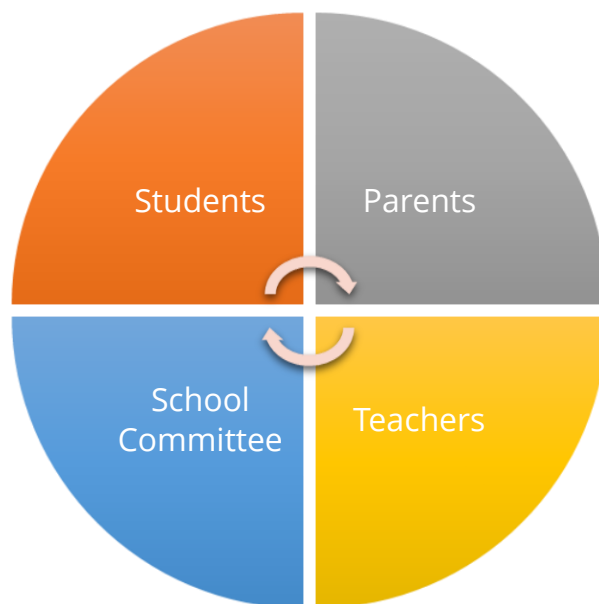


Chart 1. School Component Involvement in SRA Programs

In an interview with the SRA Program Coordinator, he explained, "We always involve students in every stage of the SRA program, because they are the subjects who feel the most impact. They actively give input on what they need to feel safer and valued" (I_KSRA_2024). The same thing was also conveyed by the Religious Teacher, who emphasized the importance of parental participation: "Parental participation is essential. We hold parenting meetings to make sure they know what is going on at school and how to support their children in going through the program" (I_GA_2024). The school committee also conveyed the importance of regular evaluation in improving the quality of the SRA program: "We hold regular discussions with the school committee to strengthen the synergy between the school, family, and community" (I_KS_2024).

Observations in the field showed that parents were actively involved in parenting activities held by the school. The forum became a proper discussion forum for parents to find out how to accompany their children in character education programs implemented in schools. The participation of parents, teachers, students, and school committees in the SRA program reflects the essential collaborative principle in character education. Involving all school components in the formation of student character shows that character is not only formed in the classroom but also through the social environment around students. Character formation requires the involvement of various parties in creating a social context that supports students' personal development.

Habit of Noble Morals and Character Education

The results of observation revealed that MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari has implemented various activities that integrate the habit of noble morals and character education in students' daily lives. The Ta'lim Morning program and Qur'anic tahfidz activities are integral to instilling religious values and character in students. During the observation, it was seen that students showed a higher attitude of discipline and more active involvement in activities related to character building. In the interview, the Supervisor explained, "We carry out Ta'lim Pagi as part of the moral habituation program. Here, we teach students to respect others, behave politely, and maintain religious values" (I_GP_2024). The IX student also stated, "I feel more disciplined now. Since joining the SRA program, I understand better how to behave in and outside school" (I_SKIX_2024). In addition, a grade VIII student also stated, "The Qur'anic tahfidz program also helped me not only in the spiritual aspect, but also in terms of discipline and responsibility" (I_SKVIII_2024).

The observation results show that Ta'lim Pagi and tahfidz activities of the Qur'an are not only religious activities, but also a tool to teach discipline, responsibility, and respect for time. This activity has helped students internalize the values they learn practically daily. The habituation of noble morals through routine activities such as Ta'lim Pagi and tahfidz of the Qur'an significantly impacts students' character. This activity deepens students' understanding of religion and teaches the values of discipline and responsibility. This supports the theory of character education of Lickona (1991), which emphasizes that character learning must be based on direct practice and continuous repetition in daily life (Affolter et al., 2020).

Integration of SRA Programs with Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities

Observations in madrassas show that the religious-based SRA program is applied in the classroom and integrated in extracurricular activities. The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Program (P5) at this madrasah emphasizes the development of social attitudes, discipline, and the spirit of cooperation through various activities such as scouting and art—the integration between the child-friendly school program and the curriculum and extracurricular activities at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari is as shown in Chart 2.

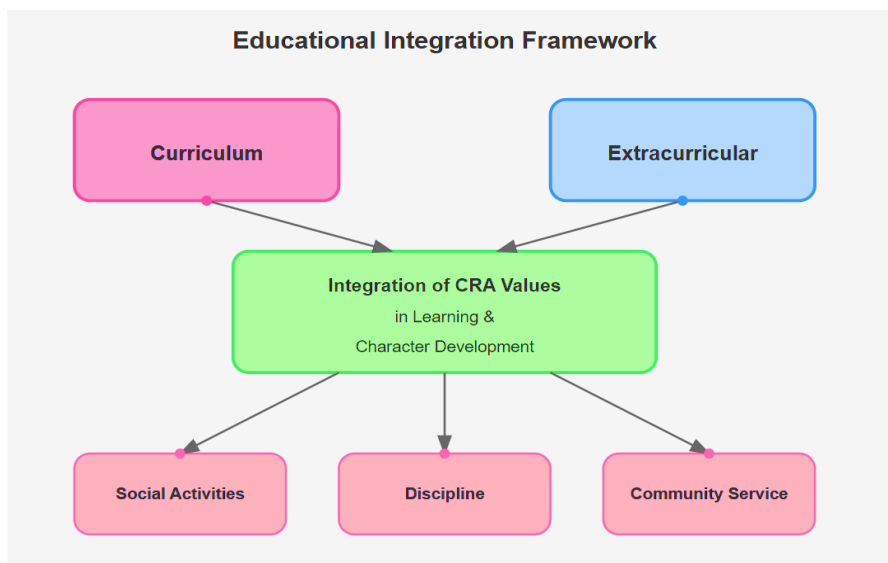


Chart 2. Integration of SRA Programs with Curriculum and Extracurricular

In an interview with the Pancasila and Citizenship Education Teacher (PPKn), he said, "We always associate every learning with Pancasila values, such as discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. The P5 project is a forum to apply these values in daily life" (I_GPKN_2024). The Extracurricular Coordinator added, "Extracurricular activities such as scouting and art are also a place to train leadership, cooperation, and a sense of nationalism" (I_Keks_2024). Thus, every activity outside the classroom supports the grand goal of the SRA program in integrating character building with students' academic and social aspects.

Discussion

Integrating the SRA Program with the curriculum and extracurricular activities shows that character education is obtained within the classroom and through various activities that allow students to directly apply those values. This aligns with the view of Affolter et al. (2020), who view education as a process that connects knowledge with students' practical experiences in social life. Thus, this approach reinforces the idea that learning should not be limited to theory, but should also involve the direct application of the values taught in the context of students' daily lives.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the religious-based Child-Friendly School Program implemented at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari effectively shapes student character according to the Pancasila Student Profile. This program shows that character education is not only limited to classroom learning, but also involves all components of the school, from policy, parental involvement, habituation of religious values, to integration in the curriculum and extracurricular activities. The SRA program, based on religious values, has succeeded in creating an environment supporting holistic student character development.

From a theoretical perspective, this study's results significantly contribute to the development of character education studies, especially those that integrate religious values and Pancasila. This finding emphasizes the importance of a moral and spiritual-based approach in character education, which aligns with the thought of Anand et al. (2021), who consider that character education must prioritize aspects of morality and spirituality. In addition, the results of this study also corroborate that the development of students' character requires intense social interaction between various parties, such as between students, teachers, parents, and school committees.

In practical terms, the findings of this study provide a clear picture of how the religious-based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) can be implemented by involving all components of the school, based on the experience gained from MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari shows that character education can not only be formed in the classroom, but also through extracurricular activities and moral habits in daily life. The religious-based SRA program in this madrasah shows that with a comprehensive and collaborative approach, schools can create an environment that not only supports the intellectual development of students but also forms a strong and noble character, in line with the values of Pancasila. These findings guide other schools in implementing the principles of holistic character education based on the nation's religious and cultural values.

CONCLUSION

This research raises important issues regarding implementing the Religion-Based Child-Friendly School Program (SRA) at MTs. Almaarif 01 Singosari, focusing on forming student character through favorable discipline policies and integrating religious values. The study results show that implementing the SRA program successfully creates an environment that supports the formation of students' character, with the active involvement of parents, teachers, and school committees. Favorable discipline policies and routine religious activities are important in improving student discipline and morality. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of collaboration between schools, families, and communities in supporting faith-based character education. The research also provides valuable insights for other schools that want to implement similar programs, paying attention to the alignment between policies, practices in the field, and student needs. The recommendations for the future are to strengthen policies and increase the role of parents in supporting character education in the school environment.

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