



Adaptive Learning Frameworks for Islamic-Based Character Education in Child-Friendly School Leadership

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine and formulate an adaptive learning framework in Islamic-based character education integrated with child-friendly school leadership. The primary focus lies on how Islamic values—including aqidah, sharia, and akhlakul karimah—are internalized through a learning approach that is responsive to the individual needs of students, and managed in a leadership climate that supports child protection and participation. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study method at the madrasah. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The results of the study show four main findings: (1) the foundation of Islamic values as the moral framework of the institution; (2) an adaptive learning approach that adapts to students' learning styles and backgrounds; (3) child-friendly leadership practices that foster a sense of security and active involvement of students; and (4) a holistic evaluation that assesses academic and character development in an integrative manner. This study recommends the development of an Islamic character-based adaptive learning model, supported by a participatory and inclusive leadership culture, within the school environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic-based character education is an urgent need in the era of globalization, where moral degradation and identity crises are affecting the younger generation (Salsabila et al., 2022; Naswa, 2025). A survey by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2023) showed an increase in cases of bullying, juvenile delinquency, and misuse of technology among students, indicating a weak foundation of character. Schools, as formal

educational institutions, should be at the forefront of shaping Islamic personalities; however, many institutions still prioritize cognitive aspects over affective ones (Surbakti et al., 2024; Maidugu, 2024). If this is allowed to continue, the younger generation will lose the noble moral values that are the foundation of a harmonious society. Therefore, this study is important for developing an adaptive learning framework that integrates Islamic values in child-friendly school leadership, thereby creating a holistic and character-based educational environment.

Today's society faces a significant challenge in the form of value disorientation, mainly due to the influence of globalization and digital media (Hakim et al., 2021; Prasetya et al., 2024). Children are increasingly exposed to uneducational content, while conventional education systems often fail to provide strong character education. In madrasahs, although based on Islam, the approach to character education remains normative and less adaptable to students' needs. Previous research has shown that monotonous and non-contextual character education methods make it difficult for students to internalize Islamic values in their daily lives (Amin, 2022; Zulnaidi, 2024; Mundofi, 2025). As a result, many madrasah graduates possess strong religious knowledge but struggle to apply moral principles. This study aims to address this issue by developing a more dynamic and relevant adaptive learning model. At Madrasah Tsanawiyah Darul Lughah Wal Karomah, there is a gap between the vision of Islamic character education and its practical application in the classroom. Initial observations indicate that teachers often employ one-way lecture methods without considering the diverse learning styles of their students.

Additionally, school leadership has not fully adopted a child-friendly approach, resulting in limited student participation in decision-making. An initial survey of 50 students revealed that 65% felt that moral lessons were less interesting and not related to their lives. This phenomenon highlights the need for a new approach that is more participatory, adaptive, and grounded in student needs, ensuring that character education is not only theoretical but also practical and applicable.

Previous studies have examined various models of Islamic character education, such as the exemplary approach (Qur'ani & Fauzi, 2021) and the integration of the hidden curriculum (Hasanah, 2020). However, most studies are still limited to conceptual aspects without touching on adaptive implementation at the school leadership level. For example, research by Wahid (2019) focuses on the role of teachers in instilling values, but ignores the role of the madrasah principal as a learning innovator. In addition, these studies tend to be generic without considering the local context of the madrasah, making them less applicable in specific settings such as MTs Darul Lughah Wal Karomah. Several

researchers have also explored the concept of child-friendly schools, but the majority focus on public schools with a secular approach (UNICEF, 2021).

Meanwhile, research in madrasahs still rarely integrates the principles of child-friendly leadership with Islamic values. Aminullah's study (2022) on madrasah-based management, for example, only touches on administrative aspects without exploring how adaptive leadership can strengthen character education. Thus, a significant research gap exists, specifically the lack of an adaptive learning framework model that synergizes child-friendly leadership with Islamic character education in madrasahs. This study is here to fill this gap with a contextual approach. The novelty of this study lies in the development of an adaptive learning framework that combines the principles of Islamic-based character education with child-friendly school leadership, especially in the madrasah environment. Unlike previous studies that were partial, this framework emphasizes collaboration between teachers, madrasah principals, and students in creating a dynamic educational ecosystem. This approach also adopts the theory of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), which is modified to incorporate Islamic values, such as shura (deliberation) and qudwah (exemplary behavior leadership). The urgency of this research is reinforced by the initial findings that madrasahs require more innovative strategies to address the challenges of the digital era without compromising Islamic values.

This study aims to answer the question: "How can an adaptive learning framework for Islamic-based character education strengthen child-friendly school leadership at MTs Darul Lughah Wal Karomah?" The main argument of the study centers on the integration of three key elements: adaptive learning to meet individual student needs, participatory leadership involving all stakeholders, and strengthening Islamic values as the basis of ethics. The synergy of these three elements is expected to create a more effective character education model than conventional approaches, which are often rigid and less engaging in involving students as active participants in their learning. This study not only fills the theoretical gap in the literature on adaptive Islamic educational leadership but also provides a practical contribution in the form of operational guidelines for madrasahs in implementing the principles of child-friendly schools based on Islamic character. In practice, the findings of this study will help madrasahs overcome the challenges of translating Islamic values into dynamic and enjoyable educational practices. By presenting a framework equipped with measurable implementation strategies—such as participatory policies, responsive curriculum design, and impact-based evaluation—this study is relevant to both academics and education practitioners. For madrasah principals and teachers, this study offers concrete solutions to strengthen character education while upholding the principles of child-friendly schools. For

educational theory developers, this study enriches insights into the integration of Islamic values with modern learning approaches.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in-depth the application of the adaptive learning framework in Islamic-based character education at MTs Darul Lughah Wal Karomah. Case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to understand phenomena holistically in real contexts through various data sources. This approach is appropriate because the study focuses on a specific case in a particular madrasah with unique characteristics, where researchers want to analyze the complex interactions between school leadership, learning processes, and Islamic values in forming a child-friendly educational environment.

The study was conducted at MTs Darul Lughah Wal Karomah, Probolinggo, East Java, which was selected purposively based on special considerations. This madrasah has a uniqueness as an Islamic educational institution, developing a child-friendly school model based on Islamic character, but it still faces challenges in its implementation. This location was chosen due to the gap between the strong character education vision and practice in the field, as well as the madrasah's commitment to collaborating in developing an adaptive learning model. The presence of a madrasah in a community environment with diverse social backgrounds is also an important consideration when choosing a location.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with the head of the madrasah, teachers, and students, participant observation of the learning process, and analysis of school curriculum and policy documents. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model through four stages: (1) data condensation by filtering relevant information, (2) data reduction to simplify and focus the findings, (3) data display in the form of matrices and narratives to facilitate interpretation, and (4) data verification through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the validity of the findings. The analysis process was carried out iteratively throughout the research to gain a comprehensive understanding.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Foundation of Islamic Values

The foundation of Islamic values in this study refers to the internalization of the values of faith, sharia, and good morals, which are implemented through the curriculum, teacher role models, and the habit of worship at MTs Darul

Lughah Wal Karomah. The data indicate that this foundation serves as a moral framework that guides all school activities, with a focus on developing student character through a holistic approach. These values are not only taught theoretically, but also integrated into daily interactions among teachers, students, and the madrasah environment.

Table 1. Findings of the Foundation of Islamic Values

Interview Excerpts	Indicator	Informant
We require students to start the day by memorizing the Qur'an 15 minutes before class.	Habitual worship	Head of Madrasah
Teachers here must be role models in attitudes, such as honesty and discipline.	Exemplary Behavior (Qudwah)	Deputy Curriculum
Every Friday there is an infaq program to train social awareness	The value of trust and charity	Teacher
We always relate the story of the Prophet to everyday problems, for example dealing with bullying	Integration of moral values	Students

The Table 1 reveals that the foundation of Islamic values is built through three main strategies: (1) ritual habituation (tahfizh, infaq) as a form of internalization of values, (2) consistent teacher role models, and (3) contextualization of values through Islamic stories. This pattern shows a top-down approach in which madrasah policies (such as mandatory tahfizh) are the main drivers, but also involve active student participation (example: infaq program).

Adaptive Learning Approach

The adaptive learning approach in the context of this research is interpreted as a teaching strategy employed by teachers who adjust methods, materials, and learning models based on the characteristics, needs, and potential of each student. In the field, this approach is not only technical, but also has a spiritual nuance, where teachers combine Islamic values in learning that is responsive to the uniqueness of each child. Teachers not only focus on academic achievement, but also on the holistic development of students' character, emotions, and spirituality.

One of the teachers said, "We try to get to know each student's character one by one. For example, some are active, some are quiet. So we create appropriate study groups so that they are comfortable. If there are those who do not understand, we explain again using an easier method." The principal added, "We encourage teachers to create flexible lesson plans. Not rigidly sticking to one method. Children are unique, and teachers must be creative in adapting. If necessary, teachers can change approaches when the classroom atmosphere is

not conducive.”

This statement indicates that teachers identify student characteristics and adjust learning strategies based on the results of these observations, making systematic efforts to create a safe and effective learning environment, which is part of an adaptive approach to achieving personal and humane learning. From this quote, the researcher observed that school leadership provides an opportunity for innovation, allowing teachers to implement adaptive learning. Teachers are given pedagogical autonomy, allowing them to respond to class dynamics in real-time. This suggests that the adaptive approach is also linked to school systems and policies that promote teaching flexibility.

In observations conducted in class IV, it was seen that teachers used different methods in explaining fiqh material. For visual students, image media was used, while for kinesthetic students, simulations of worship movements were provided. When students do not understand, the teacher does not blame them, but instead provides a personalized approach through short tutoring sessions after class hours. The researcher’s interpretation concludes that adaptive learning is not only carried out through a variety of methods, but also through an attitude of empathy, patience, and an approach that respects differences in learning styles. This confirms that adaptive learning in Islamic-based schools is carried out with a compassionate approach (*rahmah*), by the principles of Islamic education.

Thus, the adaptive learning approach in this school is realized through: (1) mapping the character and learning styles of students, (2) teacher flexibility in developing learning strategies, (3) school policy support for responsive learning, and (4) application of Islamic values in treating students with compassion and respect for differences. The pattern formed from this data shows the synergy between teachers and principals in implementing adaptive learning. This approach is an integral part of Islamic-based character education and a child-friendly school culture. This pattern includes collaboration in planning, improvisation in implementation, and continuous reflection to meet the needs of each student. Learning adaptation is not carried out uniformly, but is contextually adjusted to the conditions of the class and individual students.

Child-Friendly Leadership

Child-friendly leadership in the context of this research is interpreted as a form of leadership that prioritizes the comfort, safety, participation, and emotional development of children in the school environment. In the field, this leadership is realized through a humanistic approach, active involvement of the principal in student activities, and decision-making that considers the child’s perspective. The principal plays a role not only as an administrative manager but

also as a facilitator who ensures that every school policy and program supports the overall development needs of children.

The principal explained: "We always try to be part of the children's world. Not only giving instructions, but also listening to them. If there is a problem, we sit together, not immediately punishing them." This statement indicates that the principal serves as a mentor who views children as subjects, not objects. Preventive and dialogical actions demonstrate that child-friendly leadership is implemented through equal and empathetic relationships, rather than relying solely on hierarchy or formal rules.

One teacher stated: "Our principal often invites us to discuss if there are children who need special attention. Sometimes he comes down directly to accompany the children. So we feel supported." This statement also reflects child-friendly leadership in the collaborative relationship between the principal and teachers. The principal not only gives orders, but also becomes a coworker who provides concrete support, including in handling the special needs of students. This strengthens the school atmosphere that is inclusive and sensitive to the individual needs of children.

In field observations, researchers witnessed the principal welcoming students at the school gate with a smile and a warm greeting. In the teacher's room, there is a special communication board where teachers record the emotional conditions of the children they are sure of. The principal then follows up with a personal approach, such as inviting them to talk in an open space or involving them in positive activities. The principal also appears to be actively involved in class and religious activities. The researcher's interpretation shows that child-friendly leadership is not only symbolic, but is real in everyday actions. The presence of a principal who actively interacts directly with students and supports teachers creates a sense of psychological security and strengthens positive emotional relationships in the school environment.

Based on the data obtained, child-friendly leadership in this study includes the following aspects: (1) a dialogical and non-punitive approach in solving student problems, (2) the principal's involvement in handling students directly, (3) concrete support for teachers in responding to the diversity of student characters, and (4) the creation of a safe, open school atmosphere that supports children's emotional growth.

Holistic Evaluation

Holistic evaluation in the context of this research is interpreted as a comprehensive assessment process of student development, encompassing not only cognitive or academic aspects but also affective, psychomotor, and spiritual aspects. In the field, this evaluation is not only carried out through written exams,

but also through observations of students' daily behavior, participation in religious activities, social interactions, and responses to teacher guidance. Evaluation is ongoing and comes from various parties, including subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and principals.

In an interview, one of the homeroom teachers explained, "We don't just assess from tests. Children who are honest, diligent in worship, and like to help friends are also given additional marks in the progress report." This statement indicates that teachers consider character to be an essential component of educational achievement. Evaluation is carried out by recording students' daily behavior that reflects Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, and mutual assistance. This assessment goes beyond academic numbers and makes evaluation part of the character-building process.

The principal added, "We have a student moral observation format that is filled out by teachers every week. So it is not only the learning outcomes that we assess, but also the child's attitude and manners." This indicates that evaluation has evolved into a system that is both structurally and collectively designed. The principal provides tools that enable all teachers to track students' non-academic development. This shows that holistic evaluation in this school has a collaborative and structured dimension, strengthening the position of character as an educational priority.

During the observations conducted, it was noted that teachers maintain attitude notebooks used to record students' behavior, including punctuality, speaking manners, participation in religious activities, and concern for the environment. In addition, teachers often provide verbal feedback to students, both when they show positive attitudes and when they make mistakes, which are used as learning moments. With this, evaluations are carried out continuously and are coaching in nature. Not only to measure results, but to foster character awareness in children. Evaluations are carried out naturally in daily interactions that contain learning values.

It can be understood that the holistic evaluation applied in this school includes: (1) assessment of attitudes and manners based on direct observation, (2) involvement of many parties in the evaluation process, (3) use of simple but effective instruments, and (4) implementation of evaluations as a means of character development, not just measuring academic achievement.

Discussion

The discussion of the results of this study reveals that the four main sub-findings —namely, the Foundation of Islamic Values, Adaptive Learning Approach, Child-Friendly Leadership, and Holistic Evaluation —have strong relevance to contemporary Islamic education literature and character education

theory. The findings on the Foundation of Islamic Values align with the concept of integral education, which seeks to form civilized individuals through the integration of faith, worship, and morals (Maidugu et al., 2024; Hendawi et al., 2024). The emphasis on teacher role models and the habit of worship in this study confirms the principle that character education in Islam begins with real behavior, not just through conceptual teaching. This is consistent with a holistic approach that emphasizes the synergy between teaching, habituation, and role models as a whole in character formation.

Meanwhile, the findings on the Adaptive Learning Approach enrich the discourse on differentiated instruction, a topic that has been widely discussed in modern educational theory. However, this study makes a significant contribution by incorporating a spiritual dimension into the implementation of adaptive learning. Teachers not only adjust their teaching methods and styles but also frame them with Islamic values, such as *rahmah* (compassion) and patience (Warsah, 2020; Rivian, 2024). This represents a significant difference from Western theories, which tend to be secular. This value-based, adaptive approach demonstrates that Islamic education does not reject innovation, but instead adapts it with spiritual values, making learning more humane and contextual.

The findings related to Child-Friendly Leadership also align with the theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1999), particularly in terms of emotional involvement and teacher empowerment. However, in the context of madrasahs, this leadership has a distinctive Islamic color that positions the principal not only as a manager but also as a *murabbi* (educator) who fosters a spiritual *tarbiyah* approach. The practical implication is that principals are required to possess social and spiritual sensitivity in order to create an inclusive educational environment that supports child development (Setia et al., 2021; Tanzi, 2024). This leadership model effectively bridges administrative needs with the emotional needs of students, thereby creating a harmonious and highly supportive school culture. In terms of Holistic Evaluation, the research findings show that schools assess not only academic aspects but also student behavior and spirituality.

This aligns with Bloom's (1956) view of the three domains of evaluation (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor), but this study expands on it by incorporating a spiritual-ethical dimension. Continuous and collaborative evaluation between teachers, homeroom teachers, and principals suggests that character assessment is not the sole responsibility of one party, but rather a collective endeavor (Lillejord, 2020; Supadi et al., 2021). This practice also corrects the evaluation model that places too much emphasis on academic scores, demonstrating that the evaluation system can be a tool for character development, not just performance measurement.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the importance of integrating Islamic values in all aspects of education, from planning and implementation to evaluation (Sholeh, 2023). Practically, the results of this study can serve as an implementation model for schools or madrasahs that wish to develop a comprehensive character education system based on Islamic values. This includes technical strategies (such as the flexibility of lesson plans and character observation formats) as well as cultural and spiritual approaches (such as role models and compassion in learning). Thus, these four sub-findings are not only relevant to existing theories but also offer an adaptive, contextual, and value-based application model, which is greatly needed in shaping the character of students in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the success of Islamic-based character education in child-friendly schools is highly dependent on the complete integration of spiritual values, adaptive pedagogical approaches, empathetic leadership, and a comprehensive evaluation system. The most important finding of this study is that character education cannot be delivered solely through teaching materials, but must be realized in daily practices that involve the entire school ecosystem. The main wisdom gained is that proper Islamic education is heartfelt, adapts to children's needs, and fosters sincerity in guiding without violence or coercion.

The strength of this paper lies in its contribution to connecting the adaptive learning approach and Islamic values within the framework of child-friendly leadership and holistic evaluation. This study enriches the scientific treasury of Islamic education with an approach that is not only conceptual but also applicable based on real practices in schools. In addition, this article emphasizes the importance of an integrative perspective between spiritual, pedagogical, and managerial dimensions in forming an educational environment that builds students' character as a whole. It presents a relevant and contextual model for the development of Islamic schools in the modern era.

However, this study has several limitations. The focus of the research on a single educational institution imposes limitations on the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative approach used emphasizes depth rather than broad coverage, so that the results of this study cannot represent all forms of character education implementation in Islamic-based schools. For further research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies between schools with different social and cultural backgrounds, as well as to explore digitalization in the implementation of adaptive learning and technology-based character evaluation in greater detail. Future research can also develop more standardized but flexible Islamic character evaluation instruments.

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