

Sociology of Educational Institutions: Ethical Leadership of Madrasa Heads in Shaping the Social Character of Teachers and Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the Ethical Leadership of Madrasah Principals in Shaping the Social Character of Teachers and Students in Madrasah Tsanawiyah through the perspective of educational institution sociology. The main focus of the article is directed at the claim that the ethical leadership of madrasah principals shapes the social character of madrasah members through role modeling, consistency of rules, and a culture of collective responsibility. Field research needs to be conducted in schools, madrasahs, or pesantrens that empirically demonstrate social practices related to this issue. Primary data can be gathered through observation of the madrasah principal as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communicativeness; interviews with involved educational actors; and documentation of policies, programs, and institutional practices. Three dimensions of evidence that need to be examined are the madrasah principal as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communicativeness; teachers imitating the leadership patterns of the madrasah principal in guiding students; and madrasah policies emphasizing manners, responsibility, and social care. Using a qualitative approach, this article aims to show how social relations, institutional norms, educational authority, and the experiences of students/teachers/parents

shape everyday educational practices. The article's contribution does not stop at a case description but also aims to build a theoretical argument about how educational institutions function as social arenas that produce trust, identity, discipline, solidarity, and social change. The findings obtained are expected to enrich the discussion of Islamic education sociology in Indonesia and offer recommendations for strengthening the governance of educational institutions based on field data.

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1. Introduction

Ethical leadership in Islamic schools provides a strong foundation for building an honest learning environment. A school principal plays a role not only as a leader but also as a role model who demonstrates how to behave toward all members of the school community (Febriyani, 2020). From the perspective of educational sociology, this is important because the social nature of teachers and students is shaped through interaction and by imitating school leaders. This situation is evident at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat, where the principal employs a wise approach to leadership. From initial observations, this leadership approach successfully shapes students' sense of responsibility, as evidenced by their compliance with rules such as removing their shoes and by survey results indicating that all students feel more responsible. Recent international reviews also show that research on educational leadership increasingly connects principals' ethical and authentic conduct with teacher outcomes, organizational trust, and school improvement, which makes the present madrasah case relevant beyond a purely local administrative issue (Ahmed, 2024, 2025, 2026; Mertkan & Gümüş, 2026).

So far, the literature on madrasah leadership, as reviewed by Tobroni (024), has made a significant contribution to understanding moderation-based leadership in the Cilacap area and its surroundings. However, most of these writings are still trapped in normative and administrative discussions, where the focus is more on formal rules rather than social processes in the field. Previous studies have not extensively examined how daily interactions between leaders and subordinates can naturally shape character. Therefore, this paper

attempts to fill that gap by analyzing social mechanisms at MTs Al Ittihaad, particularly how the exemplary behavior of the madrasah's head is translated into actual social behavior by teachers and students. This gap is consistent with broader leadership scholarship which argues that school leadership must be read through institutional context, moments of change, student outcomes, and the social conditions in which leadership practices are enacted (Corrigan & Merry, 2022; Johnson et al., 2023; Özdemir et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2022).

Responding to the gaps in previous studies, this article presents a more specific focus to dissect leadership dynamics in the field. There are three main objectives that this discussion aims to achieve. First, the author wants to review how the head of the madrasah positions themselves as a central figure who upholds the principles of openness, responsibility, and discipline. Second, this study aims to portray the social process in which teachers are seen observing and re-practicing the leadership style while guiding the students. Finally, this article will evaluate the effectiveness of madrasah policies in instilling values of manners and social care in the daily life of the school community. Through this approach, it is hoped that a new understanding will emerge regarding how social character at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat is formed through ethical and sustainable leadership.

Based on this background, the author argues that the success of character building at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat relies on the ethical leadership of the principal. The author believes that the social character of teachers and students is not formed instantly, but rather through three main principles: the direct example set by the principal, consistency in enforcing rules, and a culture of collective responsibility within the school environment. Through these three principles, ethical leadership is able to transform an individual's social character into a positive and sustainable social character.

2. Methods

This research was conducted at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat, an educational institution under the supervision of Ma'arif NU with a strong character in combining pesantren values with formal education. The selection of this research location is based on the fact that the madrasah presents a prominent case of ethical leadership practices, in which the head of the madrasah serves as a role model in terms of discipline, responsibility, and communication for all members of the school. This study focuses on how social character is formed and integrated into daily policies and applicable regulations. Meanwhile, the unit of analysis in this study comprises social interactions among the head

of the madrasah, the teachers, and the 8C class students, who play a key role in implementing and responding to the institution's ethical policies.

Technically, this study is a field-based qualitative research using a case study design. This method was chosen in order to gain in-depth insights into the phenomenon of ethical leadership in a natural and specific context. The primary data in this study were directly obtained from participatory observations and in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher with key informants at the research site. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected through documentation of institutional archives, including vision and mission documents, regulatory records, and daily program schedules. All of these data were then analyzed descriptively to show how formal policies at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat are transformed into tangible social character for all members of the madrasah.

The determination of information sources in this study was carried out using purposive sampling, namely selecting individuals considered to have the most understanding of leadership phenomena and social dynamics within the institution. The main informants included the head of MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat, who served as the primary leader, as well as the teachers who implemented policies and served as communication links between the leadership and the students. To obtain the students' perspective, the researcher selected class 8C as the core analysis unit, which directly experienced the impact of implementing ethical leadership. In addition, supplementary data was also obtained from information provided by the madrasah committee and internal foundation documents to build a holistic understanding of the synergy between the educational authority and the community in developing the social character of madrasah residents.

The data collection techniques in this study were carried out through three main approaches to ensure in-depth information. First, an observation was conducted to directly record the head of the madrasah's daily activities in his role as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communicativeness at school. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather information on how teachers observe and follow the madrasah head's leadership patterns during the daily student guidance process. Lastly, documentation techniques were used to identify various official madrasah policies, habit-formation program schedules, and regulations that emphasize ethical values, responsibility, and social care. The combination of these three techniques provided the researcher with an opportunity to

perform data triangulation, enabling the phenomenon of social character formation at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat to be represented in a complete and valid way.

The data analysis in this study was conducted in a circular manner through four main steps. First, the researchers performed data condensation, in which they differentiated, simplified, and focused the field data to align with the study's focus on ethical leadership. Second, the data were presented in descriptive narratives and tables to systematically illustrate the relationships among social character variables. Third, the researchers drew initial conclusions based on patterns identified in the field. Finally, data verification was conducted through triangulation methods, which included source comparison (analyzing the statements of principals, teachers, and students), method comparison (comparing interview results with observations), and document examination (assessing the alignment between field practices and written regulations). This entire series is carried out to ensure that the results obtained at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat have scientific validity that can be accounted for.

3. Literature Review

1. Ethical leadership in sociological perspective

From the perspective of educational institution sociology, ethical leadership is understood as a moral anchor that binds all relationships among actors in the school. Referring to the concept of ethics as a system of values that governs human behavior (Ismail, 2017), ethical leadership in madrasahs is not merely compliance with formal educational institution rules, but rather institutional practices manifested in daily life interactions. Nurul Hidayati, et al. (2026) emphasize that Islamic educational institutions develop students character not only through formal instruction but also through the leader's and teachers' continuous role modeling, which fosters spiritual maturity, discipline, and noble character. This includes how honesty and trustworthiness serve as the foundation for exemplary conduct that can be observed and applied by teachers, students, and all other school members. Thus, ethical leadership becomes a tool for interpreting social phenomena at MTs Al Ittihaad, where school policies are no longer seen merely as administrative matters but as ethical agreements that strengthen social bonds among madrasah members. Contemporary studies further underline that ethical leadership is not only a leader's personal morality, but also a socially perceived practice shaped by teachers' interpretations, decision-making processes, and the way ethical climates reduce problematic student behavior (Biniaminov & Moshel, 2025;

Da'as, 2025; Keser Ozmantar & Gök, 2024; Neves, 2025b).

In practice at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat, ethical leadership involves a dynamic relationship among various actors, ranging from the principal, as the authority holder, to teachers and education staff, as policy implementers, and students, as the subjects of the policies. This dynamic relationship is crucial in institutional management to align teachers' direction and competencies with the institution's vision and mission (Asngad & Hanif, 2025). This social practice is realized through an open and democratic communication pattern, in which every decision is not only based on formal instructions but also on consistent values of exemplary behavior (Febriyani, 2020). With this pattern, students have a distinctive educational experience, in which they not only learn cognitively but also directly observe their teachers and leaders. As a result, the madrasah environment becomes a social space that effectively strengthens emotional bonds and collective responsibility among all members of the school. In this sense, ethical leadership overlaps with authentic, participative, and distributed leadership because all of them depend on trust, engagement, transparent interaction, and fair treatment within the school organization (Alazmi & Al-Mahdy, 2022; Barth et al., 2026; Liu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

2. Social Character in the Madrasah Environment

In addition to leadership, another key concept in this study is social character. Social character is understood as a manifestation of the process of value transformation and internalization that occurs within educational institutions (Ilham, 2019). Sociologically, this concept explains that madrasahs are not merely places to acquire knowledge but also spaces for shaping behavior, culture, and social relations among school members. Through continuous interaction, the values instilled by the institution then solidify into a collective identity. This, of course, can determine how individuals within an institution develop social awareness and act in accordance with the norms and rules mutually agreed upon within the madrasah environment. The sociological meaning of social character is also strengthened by character education research showing that moral growth becomes more effective when leadership, school design, habituation, and long-term ethical education are integrated into everyday institutional routines (Brown et al., 2023; Dabdoub et al., 2024; Kelly et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the social aspects of this madrasah environment can be analyzed along several practical dimensions that reinforce one another. First, this is clearly evident in the formal written regulations that govern the behavior of all school members. Second, this character is built through very specific daily routines of practicing interaction ethics, such as

the prohibition on male and female students and staff pairing to prevent slander and maintain boundaries in accordance with Islamic values.

Third, there is a system of social support as well as social supervision that is established through collective monitoring of discipline and dress manners. Finally, this category also includes how the actors, both teachers and students, react in understanding the policy.

At MTs Al Ittihaad, the reactions that arise reflect the understanding that these interaction boundaries are not meant to limit mobility, but rather are an effort to protect the social and moral identity of the madrasah members.

3. Madrasah Culture as a Social Arena

As a complement in this theoretical framework, madrasah culture is positioned as an analytical concept to assess the effectiveness of institutional practices in schools. Madrasah culture is understood as a sociological milieu encompassing a set of values, beliefs, and unique traditions within an educational institution (Ilham, 2019). Through this lens, the culture of madrasahs functions to gauge the extent to which daily practices implemented can yield tangible impacts on quality improvement, identity formation, and even the psychological well-being of students. This effectiveness is achieved if every stage of institutional management ranging from planning, organizing, implementation, to program supervision is carried out in a conducive and systematic manner (Fauzi & Hanif, 2025). Furthermore, the strong madrasah culture at MTs Al Ittihaad shapes how social character is internalized, thereby influencing students' moral and social mobility. Thus, the madrasah culture is not merely a routine, but a 'social arena' that ensures all institutional policies are transformed into actual positive behaviors. This argument is supported by recent studies which position school culture as a product of leadership work, shared religious values, and institutional routines that shape students' character and integrity in daily school life (Plaku & Leka, 2025; Setiawan et al., 2026; Sumiran et al., 2022).

The indicators of the success of madrasah culture at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat are evident in various achievements. First, there are changes in attitudes and ways of interacting within the madrasah community, who increasingly appreciate the values of courtesy, with educators modeling the democratic leadership style of the madrasah's head in educating students. Second, the results of daily habituation programs show clear progress, with students' discipline and sense of responsibility improving through regular routines. From a participant perspective, a questionnaire distributed to 22 students in class 8C yielded a 100% positive result. All respondents reported a significant

improvement in social character, specifically regarding social concern and a sense of trustworthiness, following their engagement in the madrasah's habituation programs. Consequently, this has fostered a collaborative and safe educational atmosphere, demonstrating that the madrasah culture has successfully transitioned from formal administrative policy into tangible practice that shapes the social integrity of its members.

4. Results and Discussion

1. The principal as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communication

Findings from the study at MTs Al Ittihad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat indicate that the principal consistently carries out his role as an example in discipline, trust, and communication. On May 8, 2026, the researcher observed that the principal arrived at the school earlier to ensure that teaching and learning activities were ready to proceed. In interview sessions, teachers stated that their leader used a persuasive and open communication approach when making decisions, which built trust among the staff. This is also supported by the rules and morning routine schedules, which show the principal's direct involvement in monitoring the discipline of the school community. His integrity is also evident from his trustworthiness in carrying out administrative and educational tasks, which serves as an important foundation for the behavior of other school community members.

Testing the argument against these findings shows that the leadership of the Head of the Madrasah is not merely a formal administrative practice, but an action that has a substantive social effect on professional relationships in the madrasah. If discipline and communication were purely administrative, the interaction between leaders and teachers would feel rigid and limited to formal instructions. However, the observation results show that there is fluid and communicative interaction, where the Head of the Madrasah positions themselves as both a colleague and a role model for the teachers. This pattern of interaction creates an atmosphere of 'discipline without pressure.' The teachers do not feel bureaucratically monitored; rather, an organic sense of respect arises, preventing them from neglecting discipline because they see their leader's consistency in carrying out their duties. Thus, this mechanism demonstrates that changes in social character within the madrasah environment begin with the quality of interactions between the leadership and teachers, grounded in values of trustworthiness and respect. This interpretation aligns with empirical leadership research showing that trust in the principal, leadership style, and job satisfaction influence teachers' work performance and their willingness to align with institutional goals (Khan,

2024; Kılınc et al., 2024; Parveen et al., 2022; Yohannes & Wasonga, 2023).

Of course, the emergence of this strong leadership model did not happen in a vacuum. The social conditions of MTs Al Ittihaad, located in the West Purwokerto community, highly uphold local culture, full of politeness and strong religious values. As an institution under the auspices of Ma'arif NU, there is an organizational structure that requires harmony between knowledge and noble character. Amid external pressures, such as the digitalization that is beginning to influence adolescent behavior, the role of the school principal as a moral anchor becomes crucial. A school culture that prioritizes manners over knowledge makes the disciplined and communicative character of the leader not just an administrative requirement, but an urgent need to maintain the madrasah's identity firmly. This is what makes a trustworthy leader a magnet for the madrasah community in facing changing times without losing its original values.

Research findings that position the Madrasah Principal as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communicativeness at MTs Al Ittihaad provide significant contributions to the theory of Ethical Leadership. Sociologically, this success demonstrates that leadership effectiveness in madrasahs does not depend solely on formal authority but also on the leader's ability to demonstrate Islamic values, such as justice (al-adl) and trustworthiness, as concrete examples for the school community. In line with the findings (Sibaweh, 2025), Participative and democratic leadership—by prioritizing deliberation and open communication—is capable of creating a collaborative and humanistic work environment. This emphasizes that in educational sociology practice, the head of the madrasah functions as the main agent of socialization who transforms policies into organizational culture through a personal approach and guidance by example. Thus, the communicative and trustworthy attitude of the leader becomes a prerequisite for the growth of discipline based on moral awareness, not merely compliance with bureaucratic rules.

Testing the argument against these findings shows that the role of the Head of Madrasah as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communicativeness is not merely a formal administrative practice but an action with a profound social effect. If such exemplification were purely administrative, then the responses of teachers and students would tend to be passive or merely obedient out of fear of sanctions. However, the reality on the ground shows organic acceptance, where the madrasah's members feel reluctant to deviate from the disciplinary rhythm exemplified by the leadership. This aligns with the view (Sibaweh, 2025) that leadership in madrasahs must be grounded in the value of trustworthiness, which

extends beyond the demands of the position, where leaders act as moral drivers for the entire organization. Thus, the main claim of this study is strongly supported: the exemplary behavior of the madrasah principal is a sociological instrument effective in changing school culture, as it transforms rigid rules into a collective awareness that enlivens the learning atmosphere at MTs Al Ittihaad.

2. Teachers imitate the leadership patterns of the madrasah principal in guiding students.

The second finding in this study reveals an interesting process of value transmission, where teachers consciously imitate the ethical leadership patterns of the madrasah principal in their interactions with students. The researcher's observations show that teachers at MTs Al Ittihaad use a warm and democratic communication style, precisely as modeled by their leader. In an interview conducted in front of class 8C, one teacher informant revealed that the principal's example motivated them to guide students with a more persuasive approach rather than merely issuing orders. This is reinforced by documentary evidence in the form of the teachers' habituation schedule, which shows the educators' consistency in accompanying students during routine activities, such as field and classroom habituation. This synergy creates a collaborative atmosphere where teachers no longer feel like 'rulers' of the classroom, but rather as companions who directly exemplify the values of discipline and manners to their students.

The relationship among the factors in this finding indicates that the process of adapting teachers' behavior is strongly influenced by the health of power relations within the madrasah. Policies set by the Head of the Madrasah are not imposed as rigid, one-way commands, but rather communicated through a democratic process that respects educators' opinions. This builds solid social support in the teachers' room, where institutional norms that prioritize propriety serve as an umbrella for every action. When teachers see that their leadership is trustworthy and consistent, an internal drive emerges to reflect that attitude when dealing with students. Thus, teachers imitate this leadership pattern not out of fear of sanctions, but because of trust and a sense of ownership toward the madrasah's vision. The synergy between communicative authority and a supportive environment ultimately facilitates the internalization of ethical values from leadership to teachers, and then to students. The same mechanism is also evident in studies on collective teacher efficacy, collaboration, and differentiated instruction, where principal leadership operates indirectly by fostering professional confidence and a collaborative climate among teachers (Cansoy et

al., 2022; Hammad et al., 2024; Meyer et al., 2022).

The context in which this relationship operates is greatly influenced by the position of the Head of the Madrasah as a dominant actor who does not use his authority to oppress, but rather to embrace. In this structure, the groups that benefit the most are the teachers and students, because a work environment with minimal conflict and full transparency is created; no party feels disadvantaged since every policy is decided through a discussion forum. The factors that strengthen the process of teachers emulating this leadership model are strong peer support and a consistent appreciation culture from leadership. Conversely, potentials that could weaken this relationship—such as sectoral ego or heavy administrative burdens are successfully mitigated through fluid and flexible communication. This condition creates emotional stability for the teachers at MTs Al Ittihaad, so they have enough positive energy to replicate that disciplined and trustworthy attitude when developing students' character both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, leadership that reduces alienation and strengthens teachers' growth mindset can make educators more willing to innovate and to reproduce positive guidance patterns in their own classrooms (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Kılınc, Erdoğan, et al., 2025; Kılınc, Özdemir, et al., 2025; Vermeulen et al., 2022).

The significance of teachers imitating the leadership patterns of the madrasah principal in nurturing students. Arguing against this second finding significantly reinforces the study's initial assumption that teachers are a crucial bridge in the transmission of values from leaders to students. This finding proves that teachers' behavior in imitating the principal's leadership patterns especially in aspects of warm and democratic communication is not merely hierarchical compliance, but a form of validation of the effectiveness of that leadership style. The fact that teachers feel comfortable adopting the leader's approach to nurturing students supports the initial assumption that role models are important in the madrasah environment. The process of teachers emulating the ethical leadership patterns of the madrasah principal aligns with the findings of Ali Muhdi et al. (2024), which state that the self-efficacy of Islamic Religious Education teachers has a positive effect on the quality of teachers as murabbi, where teachers who have high self-confidence tend to be more effective in guiding and developing students' character.

Rather than limiting, this finding actually broadens the research horizon by showing that when teachers 'feel humanized' by their leaders through fluid interactions, they will automatically apply the same approach in guiding students. In the context of school sociology, this collaborative atmosphere among educators can be optimized through the

management of shared platforms, such as school learning communities, which serve to enhance competence and provide a space to exchange best-practice guidance models for students (Arifin & Hanif, 2024). Thus, a consistent and sustainable character education cycle is created at MTs Al Ittihaad.

3. Madrasah policies that emphasize manners, responsibility, and social care

The third finding, which is very impressive in this study, is the effectiveness of madrasah policies in instilling values of manners, responsibility, and social care that go beyond mere written rules. The real outcome is very evident in student behavior; the researcher observed how the culture of queuing, honesty in conduct, and empathy among students became a daily sight in the school corridors. This phenomenon confirms that the internalization of basic character values in students can be strongly formed when supported by consistent habituation activities structured into the daily school schedule (Nurhayati & Hanif, 2025). The informants' subjective experiences, especially those of the 8C class students, revealed that they felt more comfortable and valued when these manners were practiced collectively. This is empirically supported by the survey results, which show that 100% of the 22 respondents reported a significant improvement in social character. Administratively and visually, this finding is supported by the neatly displayed rules documents, records of students' good points, as well as photo documentation of social activities, proving that the policies at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat have successfully transformed from mere sheets of paper into a breath of life for its students.

The implications of policies that emphasize manners force institutions to continuously innovate in their approach strategies so that these values remain relevant to students. The main strategy employed by MTs Al Ittihaad is the adaptation of a hidden curriculum, in which social care values are embedded in every lesson and extracurricular activity. There is also a subtle negotiation process between teachers and students; instead of imposing restrictive sanctions, the institution prefers reinforcement through a system of appreciation for positive behavior. If inappropriate behavior is found, limitations are implemented through personal dialogue that engages students' empathy, so they understand the reasoning behind the rule. This adaptation ensures that the manners policy does not become a rigid control instrument, but rather a collective identity strengthened by all members of the madrasah to maintain a harmonious educational environment.

The madrasah's strategy of prioritizing manners and responsibility brings significant value and opportunities for the institution's future. Internally, this consistency enhances

institution's quality of fostering a conducive learning environment where students' character develops naturally without coercion. From a social perspective, this policy provides equal space for every student to be appreciated for their achievements. The opportunities for sustaining this program are also very broad, because when manners have become a culture, they no longer depend on individual leaders but are established within the madrasa's social system. In the long term, graduates of MTs Al Ittihaad not only possess cognitive skills but also social capital, including care and responsibility for engaging the community. This becomes the institution's unique selling point in producing a generation that is intellectually sharp yet socially humble. The findings of this study are supported by Arina's research at MTsN 1 Kebumen, which states that the success of character formation is significantly supported by consistent madrasah policies that emphasize habituation, supervision, and the internalization of values such as courtesy and responsibility (Mayangfa'una & Muhdi, 2026).

The third finding regarding the effectiveness of madrasah policies that emphasize manners, responsibility, and social care provides important implications for the development of Madrasah Culture theory. This success shows that school culture does not grow rather results from results from character development. In line with the argument (Saputra et al., 2022), educational policies grounded in values of compassion and a humanistic approach can create a peaceful learning environment that supports the development of students' religious character. The implication for educational policy practice is that the strictness of sanctions does not determine the success of a regulation, but by the extent to which the policy is able to reach students' awareness—as evidenced by the 100% survey results in class 8C. This proves that when a policy is managed with the spirit of 'education that humanizes,' it will transform into a collective identity that strengthens the moral integrity of all madrasah members.

Education policies in madrasahs must foster an ecosystem that integrates cognitive development with the strengthening of religious character to create a conducive learning environment. By implementing humanistic values within the framework of Islamic education, madrasahs can effectively build a preventive barrier against potential behavioral deviations and juvenile delinquency among students (Pangesti & Hanif, 2026). The implication for educational policy practice is that the success of a rule is not determined by the strictness of its sanctions, but by the extent to which the policy can reach the students' consciousness as seen from the 100% survey results in class 8C. This proves that when a policy is managed with a humanistic approach and exemplary behavior, it can transform into

a collective identity that strengthens the institution's social capital, shaping a generation that is not only intelligent but also possesses high moral integrity. From an inclusive education perspective, such policy also needs to be sensitive to diversity, power relations, and teachers' motivation so that ethical leadership does not become moral control, but remains a humanizing practice that protects students' dignity (Bhattarai, 2025; Mbelu, 2025; Nassir & Benoliel, 2024; Neves, 2025a).

Testing the argument against madrasah policies that emphasize manners, responsibility, and social care shows that this phenomenon reflects substantive social change rather than merely a symbolic image of the institution. If this policy were merely symbolic for image purposes, these values would appear only in visual aspects or formal documents, without being internalized in students' daily behavior. However, field evidence showing the consistency of students' attitudes outside class hours and survey results reaching 100% confirm the existence of a shift in values within the madrasah's social structure. This change is substantive because manners have transformed from merely being 'enforced rules' to a 'sociological necessity' for students to create a comfortable environment. Thus, the claim that this policy successfully builds character is valid, as it has changed how students interact and view their social responsibilities as part of their self-identity at MTs Al Ittihaad.

5. Conclusion

The most important conclusion that can only be revealed through this field research is the existence of a 'role model resonance' mechanism that binds all members of the madrasah emotionally and sociologically. This study shows that the head of the madrasah, who serves as a model of discipline, trustworthiness, and communicativeness, not only performs managerial functions but also serves as a source of moral energy that motivates teachers to voluntarily replicate these behaviors. This social mechanism shows that teachers imitate leadership patterns not because of hierarchical pressure but because of respect for the leader's integrity. This then has implications for madrasah policies that emphasize manners; these policies are no longer perceived by students as an administrative burden but rather as a collective culture that fosters a sense of responsibility and social care. Without direct observation, the fluid and organic dynamics of the 'contagion of kindness' would not be discernible, proving that the success of character education at MTs Al Ittihaad is rooted in the alignment between the leaders' example, teachers' internalization, and students' sociological comfort.

Methodologically and theoretically, the combination of the concepts of Ethical Leadership,

Social Character, and Madrasah Culture has proven to be very sharp in dissecting the complexity of this research problem. The concept of Ethical Leadership effectively captures the initial source of change, while Social Character and Madrasah Culture explain how these values are established and practiced by teachers and students. The use of a qualitative case study method is a crucial instrument in this process, as it allows the researcher to capture the meaning behind actions, expressions, and interactions that cannot be captured by numerical data alone. This approach provides the researcher with space to deeply engage with the sociological reality at MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat, so that the social mechanisms connecting the role modeling of leaders with the transformation of student behavior can be fully, logically, and humanely explained.

Although providing in-depth findings, this study has limitations that need to be acknowledged. The main limitation lies in the focus of the research, which only concentrates on one institution, namely MTs Al Ittihaad Ma'arif NU 1 Purwokerto Barat, as well as the limited observation period, which does not allow capturing the dynamics of student character changes in the long term. In addition, access to certain administrative documents is still limited to general data. Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future research conduct comparative studies across institutions with different characteristics to enrich the body of Madrasah Culture theory. The use of mixed-methods research is also highly recommended to strengthen qualitative findings with broader quantitative data, enabling more precise measurement of the correlation between the principal's ethical leadership and improvements in student character quality and generalization.

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