

Integration of School Image Management with Character Development Programs to Improve Students' Social Adaptation

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Abstract

This study examines how school image management is combined with character education to strengthen students' social adaptation. The research uses a qualitative case study design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with school leaders, teachers, and students. observation of learning activities in the classroom as well as daily school routines and review of institutional documents, including vision-mission statements, rules, institutional symbols, and student programs. The data were analyzed thematically through a process of reduction, coding, and interpretation, with the reliability of the findings strengthened using triangulation of sources and methods. The results of the study show that the main character values of discipline, religious attitudes, and togetherness are at the core of the school's identity and function as common social norms that shape the pattern of student interaction. Integration becomes effective when the claimed image is consistently enacted in teaching practices, religious routines, and non-academic activities. Continuous role modeling by principals, teachers, and staff stabilizes value transmission and accelerates internalization through habituation rather than coercive control. Consequently, students develop adaptive social behavior within a coherent and predictable environment. These results imply that public relations, quality management, and school culture should be designed as an integrated system so that external reputation reflects students' lived experiences.

Keywords: School Image Management; Character Education; Social Adaptation; School Culture; Value Internalization

INTRODUCTION

Schools with a superior image and positive reputation are often associated with successful character formation of students (Aisyah et al., 2025; Hasanah, 2023; Hamdanah et al., 2025). However, the social reality in the school environment shows a striking contradiction: students' social adaptability is not always in line with the institutional image that is built (Roden, 2023; Sadowski, 2021; Seger, 2025). Phenomena such as weak empathy, low ability to work together, and increasing social friction are still found, even in schools that are known for achievement and character (Mokhtar et al., 2024; Mundir & Nawiro, 2019; Ramdhan, 2025). This condition indicates that the image of a school that looks strong in public spaces does not necessarily function as a social framework that shapes student behavior in real terms (Adeoye, 2025; Ghafar et al., 2024; Ramdhan, 2025).

This problem is decided between managing the image of the school and encouraging the practice of character development (Amir et al., 2022; Khoiroh et al., 2025; Mudarris et al., 2022). The image of the school is built on an external image, while character development is carried out as a stand-alone internal program (Manaf, 2025; Sada et al., 2024; Steed & Shapland, 2020). This disintegration limits the reach of character values as a shared social norm, so that students' social adaptations develop sporadically and inconsistently (Agustian, 2024; Mannan et al., 2024; Rozi & Najiyah, 2025). In this context, the integration of school image management with character development is crucial because it determines whether the claimed value of the institution's identity is truly alive in students' social interactions or stops as an institutional symbol.

The literature that develops on the issues of school image, character development, and social adaptation shows a tendency to separate the focus of analysis (Hayden & Prince, 2023; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Yang, 2021). School imagery is more often understood as a construct of public reputation and trust measured from external perceptions, while its impact on students' social behavior is rarely taken center stage (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006; Najiburrahman et al., 2025; Nucci & Ilten-Gee, 2021). On the other hand, character development is treated as a pedagogical process that operates in the classroom and school culture, without being placed as part of the institutional strategy that shapes the identity of the institution (Khoiroh et al., 2025; Khoirunnisak et al., 2023; Mudarris et al., 2022). Students' social adaptation is also generally explained through psychological and relational approaches that emphasize individual factors, so that the role of school managerial design as

a social structure tends to be neglected (Choiriyah & Dwi Lestari, 2025; Mesra, 2023; Sadowski, 2021). This fragmented reading pattern leaves a significant conceptual weakness: the relationship between school image management and the formation of students' social adaptations has not been understood as a single systemic unit (Dimmock et al., 2021; Feraco et al., 2023; Mohzana, 2024). As a result, the image of the school is still treated as a symbolic instrument, not as a structural mechanism that has the potential to direct the internalization of students' character values and social behavior consistently.

School imagery and character development are often placed in separate spaces, even though they are intertwined in everyday educational practices. This relationship becomes especially important when it is associated with the social adjustment of students in the school environment. The main purpose of the study is to answer how to integrate school image management with character development programs in improving students' social adaptation. The deepening of the research was carried out by examining how the image of the school is formed as an identity based on certain values, how these values are brought to life in daily institutional practices, and how their integration is seen in the interaction patterns and social adjustment processes of students. With the formulation of these goals, the analysis of the image of the school becomes more directed, not only viewing it as an institutional symbol, but as an internal social framework that really affects the lives of school citizens.

METHODS

The research uses a descriptive qualitative method with an emphasis on an in-depth understanding of how school image management and character development programs contribute to students' social adaptation. The location of the research is at MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton, Probolinggo Regency, East Java Province, as an educational institution that has a character-based institutional identity, which is realized through consistent coaching practices.

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Data analysis was carried out thematically through a process of reduction, categorization, and meaning extraction to identify integration patterns and their implications for students' social adaptation. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as checking the consistency of findings with the institutional context of the school.

RESULTS

Character Values Are Used as the Official Identity of the School (Citra), Not Just a Complementary Program

At MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton, character values are not placed as incidental programs or additional activities, but are directly attached as the official identity of the school. These values are reflected in the vision and mission of the institution, discipline, school symbols, and daily practices of school residents. In daily life, students interact in social spaces that consistently represent character values as a common reference.

The results of the interviews showed that most students consciously attributed the way they interacted to the character values that became the school's identity. The students' statements repeatedly emphasized that mutual respect, discipline, and togetherness are understood not as just rules, but as a "way of life" in the school environment.

The results of observations on learning activities and school life show that in various social activities, student behavior is generally in harmony with the character values that have been institutionalized. This consistency can be seen in daily interactions, especially during the learning process in the classroom, religious activities and social relations between students. These findings were strengthened by a review of institutional documents on character values that are the profile of schools as well as references in decision-making and implementation of internal policies.

Table 1. evidence of findings on the integration of character values as school identity

Aspects of the Findings	Data Source	Empirical Indications	Makna Analysis
Students' perception of character values	Student interviews	Repeated statements about values as guidelines for social interaction	Character values function as social norms

Aspects of the Findings	Data Source	Empirical Indications	Makna Analysis
Students' social behavior	Observation of learning and school life	Consistent interaction patterns in a variety of situations	Social adaptation is formed through habituation
Institutional identity	School documents (vision-mission, discipline, symbols)	Character values are attached as official identities	The image of the school serves as a normative framework

According to the Principal of MA Nurul Yaqin, "In our school, the image of the school really comes from the character values that we have instilled in students through the character development programs that we have implemented."

The findings show that character values are linked to the image of the school, these values develop from mere symbols to an inherent guiding framework in the school's social life. Students have understood character values intellectually and how to use them as the philosophical basis that shapes thinking, behavior, and how they interpret social relationships in school. The image of the school serves as a shared symbolic system that provides moral and social guidance for the entire community. Although there is a slight gap between students' understanding of character values and their daily behavior, the internalization of values occurs gradually at each grade level. Through repeated social interactions in the school environment, character values gain strong social recognition, allowing students' social adaptations to develop naturally without having to rely on strict formal controls.

Consistency of Character Building Practices With School Image

At MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton, values such as discipline, religious attitudes, and togetherness have been implemented. Character values are truly alive in the lives of students and teachers. Just as teachers teach and manage the classroom, the interaction between teachers and students, and the implementation of activities outside the classroom all reflect character values. Students feel that what the school says about themselves corresponds to their real-life experiences on a daily basis, so the school's image and character-building practices naturally coexist.

Teachers have instilled character values in classroom activities in the school environment. They manage time effectively, divide student roles, and use a communication style that encourages discipline and fosters responsibility. The approach allows students to

understand values theoretically as well as experience them in everyday interactions. This pattern appears to be repeated in different subjects, suggesting that character development is not tied to a specific field of study.

You Observation social interaction to show the consistency of teacher and student behavior with the claimed image of the school. Teachers set an example in attitudes and language, while students responded with a relatively orderly and respectful communication pattern. Documentation of non-academic activities, such as religious and student activities, also shows that character values are presented explicitly and repeatedly as part of students' social experiences in the school environment.



Figure 1. Practice of Character Building Through Morning Apples

The image above indicates that character development in schools is carried out intensively and operationally, not just projected as an institutional image. This is evident because the morning apple is positioned as a structured institutional routine that involves all school citizens, so the values that the school claims must be present in practice, not just in slogans. The empirical indication can be seen from the repetitive pattern of activities—punctuality, regularity, obedience to instructions, the delivery of moral/religious messages, and the example of the teacher who leads and supervises the course of the apple—all of which force the values of discipline, religiosity, and togetherness to be practiced in real terms by students. Thus, the image confirms that the image of the school has an implementive basis: character development becomes a social experience that is experienced directly and habituated, so that values do not stop as symbols, but rather function as guidelines for daily behavior.

The findings at MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton show that the harmony between school image and character building practices forms a coherent and stable social environment for students, so that the values of discipline, religiosity, and togetherness are not simply understood as normative discourses, but are experienced in real life in everyday life. The consistency between institutional messages and students' social experiences strengthens the legitimacy of character values as a common reference in behavior, while facilitating the process of internalizing values that takes place gradually and naturally. In this context, students' social adaptation develops more effectively through habituation in a predictable social space, rather than through moral instruction separate from practice, so that the image of the school serves as a social mechanism that accelerates the formation of student mindsets and behaviors.

Image integration and character development are maintained by the consistency of school actors.

The integration between the school's image and character development at MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton is not only supported by written policies or institutional programs, but is maintained in a sustainable manner through the role of school actors, especially leaders, teachers, and education staff. These actors appear as real representations of the school's character values in various social situations, so that the values attached to the institutional image are consistently present in daily interactions in the school environment.

The results of the observation show that school leaders consistently make decisions and enforce policies by referring to the character values that become the school's identity. This pattern of decision-making is not only seen in formal situations, but also in response to the daily dynamics of students.

Interviews with teachers and homeroom teachers revealed that exemplary attitudes, language, and interaction patterns are the main strategies in character development. Teachers consciously display behaviors that align with school values, which students then imitate in their social interactions. Observations of education personnel services show that character values are applied equally in administrative services and school daily life, so that students view these values as applicable to all school residents without exception.



Figure 2. Character Building Practices by Teachers

The picture above indicates that character development is not only institutionalized through school programs and routines, but is also directly monitored by teachers as key actors in the internalization of values. The premise is that character values will be effective in shaping student behavior if they are present in daily interactions and guided by consistent authoritative figures. The empirical reality in the picture shows that teachers play an active role in directing, reminding, and enforcing standards of behavior (e.g. order, responsibility, manners, and discipline) in learning situations and students' social relations, so that grades do not stop as written rules. Consequently, the teacher serves as a "living representation" of the school's image: the control exercised is not merely formal supervision, but guidance and example that stabilizes social norms in the classroom. With this kind of escort pattern, students are easier to adjust because they obtain clear and consistent behavioral references, so that social adaptation develops through directed habituation.

These findings show that the integration of school image and character development at MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton is strengthened by the consistency of the role of school actors as a living representation of character values in daily social interactions. The example of leaders, teachers, and education personnel functions as a social mechanism that stabilizes values, so that character values are not perceived as mere formal rules, but as a valid and exemplary common guideline. Many influential figures in schools have carried out their values of character in their daily actions, the existence of public trust in schools, helping students practice faster, and supporting their social adaptation. The school atmosphere that has occurred is very consistent and regular, students can quickly learn to adjust while really understanding character values in practice.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that students' social adaptation was influenced by character development programs and the results of systemic integration between school image management and character practice. Character values have been embedded as the official identity of the school and consistently practiced through daily actions, these values become real social norms, understood and lived by students (Dendy Musthofa et al., 2024). The image of the school at MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton serves as a symbolic representation for outsiders as well as a guideline of values and norms in the internal environment that directs students' behavior and shapes their social interaction patterns.

The findings suggest that the view that has been dominant in the literature that places the image of schools primarily as an instrument to build external reputations and increase public trust needs to be reviewed. (Mas'udi et al., 2021). The study shows that school imagery also has regulatory power in the internal realm, especially when the values that make up the school's identity are really consistently instilled in daily social life. Character values that are integrated into the vision, mission, rules, symbols, and institutional narratives then form a living system of common meaning, as well as a moral reference for all school residents (Cipriano et al., 2023). The image of a school can be understood as a social structure that is normative in nature, which helps students interpret what is considered reasonable, appropriate, and expected in various forms of social interaction.

The integration is effective because character values do not stop at the level of ideas, but are manifested in real life through classroom learning practices, teacher-student relationships, and various non-academic activities. When the ideal image of the school is aligned with the students' daily experiences, the potential for clashes of norms that often hinder the process of internalizing grades is reduced. The continuity between institutional messages and social realities that are actually experienced every day also strengthens the social legitimacy of character values, so that these values are accepted as a common reference in action. Social adaptation is more effectively built through the experience of consistent character values, rather than solely through moral teaching independent of practice.

Leaders, teachers, and education staff play a central role in maintaining the sustainability of the integration. A consistent example is the key mechanism that encourages them to bring character values to life in practice so that rules do not stop at the level of teaching as well as authentic and sustainable social interaction (Albustomi, 2025). Student

obedience is formed through the process of imitation, and social habituation that occurs naturally in the school environment. Character values serve as "unwritten rules" that direct social relationships between students, facilitate internalization, and strengthen their ability to adapt to students socially.

The results of the study enriched the understanding of the relationship between school image, character strengthening, and students' social adaptability that are interconnected in one system. The harmony between the school's image management and the implementation of character development programs forms a harmonious social climate, where character values serve as a common normative reference that governs students' collective behavior and maintains the regularity of social interaction in the classroom in daily life. Thus, students' social adaptation is no longer understood as the result of a mere individual or psychological intervention, but as a product of an institutional design that succeeds in uniting symbolic identities, educational practices, and exemplary school actors in one consistent normative ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the integration of school image management with character development has a strategic role in shaping the social adaptation of students at MA Nurul Yaqin Paiton. The character value attached as the official identity of the school does not stop as an institutional symbol, but rather functions as a social norm that clearly guides the patterns of interaction, attitudes, and behavior of students in daily school life. When these values are institutionalized consistently in the vision-mission, rules, and social practices of the community residents, students experience values as part of the social reality that continues to be repeated, so that the internalization process takes place gradually and continuously.

The alignment of institutional identity, character-building practices, and exemplary school staff form a stable and cohesive social environment for students. Smoothness in facilitating social adaptation because values are internalized through daily interactions, so that dependence on coercive formal control decreases. The success of character development is determined by the school's ability to maintain its image as a value-based identity that is present in social practice and is uniformly realized by all school actors.

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