

Comparative Study of Character Education Policies at MI Hidayatul Insan and SDN 3 Matesih

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Abstract

This study addresses the limited research on character education policies in Islamic and public elementary schools, despite their crucial role in shaping students' moral and spiritual development. The research aims to analyze and compare how *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) Hidayatul Insan and *Sekolah Dasar Negeri* (SDN) 3 Matesih design and implement character education policies in alignment with their institutional missions and cultural contexts. Employing a qualitative comparative case study design, the study selected both schools through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and curriculum document analysis, and were analyzed thematically to uncover patterns of similarity and difference in policy implementation. Findings reveal that both institutions emphasize core values such as discipline, responsibility, politeness, and cooperation. However, MI Hidayatul Insan integrates character education with a strong focus on religious and spiritual values embedded in Islamic learning activities, while SDN 3 Matesih emphasizes civic and social values aligned with the national character education framework. The study concludes that institutional vision and religious orientation significantly shape the priorities and strategies of character education. The findings contribute theoretically to comparative studies between Islamic and public education systems and offer practical insights for policymakers and educators seeking to integrate religious and civic values more holistically into national character education policies. Future research is

recommended to explore cross-regional or longitudinal analyses to evaluate the long-term impact of character education across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: Character Education Policy; Comparative Study; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Public Elementary School; Moral and Spiritual Development

INTRODUCTION

Moral degradation among the younger generation has become a growing concern both nationally and globally. Internationally, studies have shown a decline in youth ethical awareness and civic engagement due to globalization, digitalization, and the weakening of traditional moral values (Evans et al., 2020; Gaby, 2017; Metzger et al., 2018). Similarly, in Indonesia, character crises among students, manifested through intolerance, dishonesty, and lack of discipline, have raised concerns about the effectiveness of moral education in schools (Jumari et al., 2024; Syari'ah et al., 2025). These conditions highlight the urgent need to strengthen ethical, moral, and spiritual foundations through systematic character education as part of the national development agenda.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has emphasized character education as a national priority in the Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Panjang Nasional (RPJP) 2005–2025 (Law No. 17 of 2007), aiming to cultivate citizens with noble character, strong morality, and respect for cultural diversity. Singh (2019) argues that character education is not only about teaching moral values but also about forming habits that embody honesty, responsibility, and empathy in daily life. Jauhari et al. (2023) further explain that education must cultivate moral reasoning and behavioral habituation so that moral values become an integral part of students' personalities. These expert perspectives reinforce the importance of embedding character education as a holistic approach that integrates knowledge, emotion, and behaviour.

Several previous studies have examined the implementation of character education in Indonesia. Nurwataniah et al. (2023) explored character-based curriculum design in primary schools, while Sakban & Sundawa (2023) analyzed the philosophical foundations of national character education. Other studies have compared public and Islamic schools, revealing that Islamic-based institutions tend to emphasize spiritual and religious character, whereas public schools focus more on civic and social values (Fauziyah & Mubarok, 2023;

Kultsum et al., 2022). However, most of these studies primarily discuss pedagogical strategies or curriculum content, rather than the policy dimension that governs how character education is institutionalized and implemented at the school level.

This gap indicates a limited understanding of how institutional missions and religious orientations influence the design and implementation of character education policies across different school types. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis of character education policies between Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) and Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN), two institutions operating under distinct educational and cultural frameworks. Supported by Lickona's theory of moral education (Arif et al., 2023) and the Indonesian national character policy framework (Setiawati et al., 2025), this study situates itself within the discourse of moral development and educational policy.

Therefore, this study focuses on comparing the character education policies implemented at MI Hidayatul Insan and SDN 3 Matesih. It aims to analyze how both schools formulate, implement, and internalize character education values in line with their institutional visions and cultural contexts. By examining the similarities and differences between the two, this research seeks to contribute to understanding how Islamic-based and public elementary schools operationalize national character education goals in practical, policy-driven contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, comparative-descriptive case study design to explore how character education policies are implemented across different types of educational institutions. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to interpret educational and social phenomena based on participants' lived experiences and contextual meanings (Creswell, 2014; Dodgson, 2017). The comparative case study design was appropriate for systematically examining similarities and differences between Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Hidayatul Insan and Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN) 3 Matesih, representing Islamic-based and public education systems, respectively. According to Alwasilah (2015), case study research is suitable for analyzing educational phenomena within real-life contexts where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are blurred. Unlike previous studies that mainly emphasized curriculum content or teaching practices (Amanah et al., 2024; Bancin et al., 2024; Muchtarom, 2023; Nurwataniah et al., 2023), this research

contributes to the field by focusing on the policy dimension of character education at the institutional level. The population included elementary schools in Matesih District, Central Java, that implement national character education programs. Two schools were selected purposively based on their relevance to the study objectives, involving two principals and six teachers (three from each institution) who actively participated in curriculum planning and implementation (Mezmir, 2020).

Data were collected from April to June 2025 through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with principals and teachers to obtain insights into institutional strategies and challenges in implementing character education. Observations were carried out to identify learning practices, rituals, and activities that reflect the integration of moral and religious values. Document analysis covered curricula, syllabi, lesson plans, and policy documents to examine the structure and content related to character development (Arif et al., 2023; Setiawati et al., 2025). Data validity was ensured using source and method triangulation, comparing information from interviews, observations, and documents to strengthen consistency and accuracy (Dodgson, 2017). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024).

RESULTS

Implementation of Character Education at MI Hidayatul Insan Karanganyar

The findings from MI Hidayatul Insan Karanganyar reveal that character education is implemented comprehensively through classroom instruction, religious habituation, and the creation of a moral school culture. Based on interviews with teachers and students, the school integrates character values into lesson plans, ensuring that every subject supports moral development. Teachers consciously embed values such as religiosity, discipline, honesty, humility, and cooperation in daily lessons. According to the teachers interviewed, these values align with the learning competencies, with an emphasis on internalizing them through both academic and non-academic activities.

Empirical evidence from classroom observations on May 12, 2025, supports the interview data. Students were observed greeting teachers with handshakes, praying before lessons, and reciting Qur'anic verses together at the start of each school day. These habitual

actions reflect the school's emphasis on discipline, respect, and faith-based behavior. In physical education lessons, students practiced teamwork and sportsmanship, showing discipline and persistence during group exercises. Teachers also implemented structured reinforcement strategies; students who forgot their juz 'amma were asked to write istighfar as a reflection, while high-performing students were recognized through the "Achievement Board." These practices build a sense of accountability and positive motivation among learners.

The document analysis confirmed that these values are systematically embedded in the school's curriculum design. Lesson plans explicitly include character values under each learning objective, ensuring consistency across subjects. Moreover, integrating faith-based and moral instruction into every activity demonstrates MI Hidayatul Insan's holistic approach. This approach positions all teachers as moral educators responsible for shaping students' character beyond academic instruction.

Table 1. Daily Character Education Activities at MI Hidayatul Insan Karanganyar

Activity	Core Values	Evidence from Observation
Morning prayer and Qur'an recitation	Religiosity, discipline	Students pray and read Qur'an before class
Classroom learning	Honesty, cooperation	Group assignments fostering collaboration
Physical education	Sportsmanship, responsibility	Students respect peers during team games
Achievement board	Motivation, responsibility	Recognition of exemplary student behavior

Implementation of Character Education at SDN 3 Matesih

At SDN 3 Matesih, character education is implemented through the optimization of school facilities, classroom activities, and extracurricular programs that promote discipline, cooperation, and responsibility. Interviews with teachers and the principal revealed that physical spaces, such as the honesty canteen, prayer room, handwashing stations, and waste bank, serve as educational tools for character formation. These facilities encourage students to practice honesty, cleanliness, and environmental awareness as part of their daily routine. Teachers reported that the school environment functions as a "living classroom," where moral values are internalized through daily practices.

Field observations confirmed that classroom routines strongly support moral development. Each morning, students pray together, sing the national anthem, and recite short Qur’anic verses. Teachers then check attendance, neatness, and classroom cleanliness, reinforcing discipline and responsibility. Students were also observed politely asking permission before leaving the classroom, helping peers with learning materials, and actively participating in group work, demonstrating cooperation and empathy. These activities show that the school fosters a culture of respect and care, where learning extends beyond academic achievement toward moral maturity.

Document reviews of lesson plans revealed that teachers explicitly embed character values within learning objectives. For instance, science lessons emphasize environmental responsibility, while civic education promotes honesty and patriotism. Extracurricular programs such as scouting, volleyball, taekwondo, and traditional dance further reinforce these values through practical experience. The consistent implementation of both classroom and extracurricular strategies reflects the school’s alignment with Indonesia’s Peraturan Presiden Nomor 87 Tahun 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, ensuring that cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of learning are integrated harmoniously.

Table 2. School-Based Character Education Practices at SDN 3 Matesih

Activity	Core Values	Evidence from Observation
Honesty canteen	Integrity, self-control	Students purchase items without supervision
Waste bank	Environmental care	Students recycle materials collaboratively
Morning ceremony	Discipline, nationalism	Students sing the national anthem daily
Extracurriculars	Teamwork, perseverance	Active participation in scouting and sports

Comparative Analysis of Character Education Models

The comparative analysis between MI Hidayatul Insan and SDN 3 Matesih highlights both convergence and divergence in the implementation of character education. Both institutions adopt an integrative approach by embedding moral values across academic subjects and school activities. However, the thematic focus and strategies differ. MI Hidayatul Insan emphasizes faith-based character formation, centred on religiosity and moral discipline, while SDN 3 Matesih prioritizes civic and environmental values, supported by the school’s facilities and extracurricular culture. This distinction reflects how institutional identity and context shape the articulation of character education.

Observation and interview data show that MI Hidayatul Insan’s model is more teacher-led, with a strong emphasis on religious habituation and moral obedience. In contrast, SDN 3 Matesih promotes participatory learning, in which students engage in cooperative, experiential moral learning through community-based activities. Teachers at both schools serve as moral exemplars; however, SDN 3 Matesih tends to give students greater autonomy to take on responsibility and initiative. This variation demonstrates that character education can be effectively implemented through multiple pathways, depending on institutional ethos and available resources.

Document analysis further supports these differences, revealing that both schools integrate character education systematically within their curriculum planning but emphasize different domains of moral development. MI Hidayatul Insan focuses on spiritual and behavioral alignment with Islamic teachings, while SDN 3 Matesih integrates character formation through civic engagement and environmental consciousness. Despite these differences, both schools succeed in developing holistic learners who embody discipline, cooperation, honesty, and responsibility, affirming the effectiveness of context-based character education in Indonesian elementary schools.

Table 3. School-Based Character Education Practices at SDN 3 Matesih

Aspect	MI Hidayatul Insan Karanganyar	SDN 3 Matesih
Core Focus	Religious and moral discipline	Civic and environmental values
Implementation Model	Faith-based integration in all subjects	Experiential learning via facilities and extracurriculars
Teacher Role	Religious mentor and value enforcer	Facilitator and behavioral model
Student Involvement	Ritual participation and moral reflection	Collaborative learning and peer engagement
Evaluation Strategy	Observation and teacher reflection	Observation and collective feedback

DISCUSSION

Character Education Implementation in MI Hidayatul Insan and SDN 3 Matesih

The findings indicate that both MI Hidayatul Insan and SDN 3 Matesih implement character education as an essential part of their institutional identity and daily school culture. At MI Hidayatul Insan, character development is rooted in Islamic values and reinforced through religious habituation, such as shalat dhuha, tahsin, and dzikir, which cultivate

spirituality, discipline, and sincerity. This practice aligns with the notions of Islamic moral pedagogy outlined by Chusniyah & Makruf (2024) and Suleymanova (2020), emphasising that moral growth occurs through faith-based habituation and the internalisation of religious values. Conversely, SDN 3 Matesih integrates character education through civic-oriented activities such as classroom democracy, environmental awareness, and social cooperation, which align with experiential learning theory, where moral learning emerges through active participation and reflection in social contexts (Burke, 2020).

Although both schools employ different approaches, the study reveals that their core objectives converge on building disciplined, responsible, and empathetic students. This supports Lickona's comprehensive character education model, which posits that moral formation requires integrating moral knowing, moral feeling, and ethical action (Arif et al., 2023). The dual approach—based and civic-based—demonstrates that effective character education can take multiple forms, as long as it is consistent, contextual, and integrated into the school's ethos. These findings highlight that Indonesia's diverse educational landscape can accommodate various paths to achieving shared national goals of moral and ethical development.

Comparative Policy Orientation and Institutional Culture

From a policy perspective, MI Hidayatul Insan's approach aligns closely with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' curriculum framework, which centres religious character in its learning objectives. In contrast, SDN 3 Matesih follows the Ministry of Education's Kurikulum Merdeka principles, emphasizing civic and social competencies. Despite these administrative distinctions, both institutions operationalize character education beyond formal curriculum documents by embedding values into teaching methods, teacher-student interactions, and extracurricular activities. This confirms Mutohar et al.'s (2021) argument that school culture and teacher modeling are more influential in shaping moral behavior than policy statements alone.

The comparative results also highlight that MI Hidayatul Insan exhibits a more structured integration of moral and spiritual practices, while SDN 3 Matesih relies more on experiential and participatory learning to instill ethical awareness. These differences are not oppositional but complementary, illustrating what Kuenzi et al. (2020) term contextual moral development, in which both institutional norms and sociocultural environments shape moral

formation. Previous studies (Amanah et al., 2024; Muchtarom, 2023) have primarily focused on curriculum content or teacher perceptions, whereas this study advances the discussion by uncovering how institutional policy, leadership, and daily practices collectively construct a moral ecosystem within schools.

Implications and Limitations

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it strengthens the framework of contextual character education by showing that moral development in Indonesia is not monolithic but adaptive to institutional missions and community values. Practically, it underscores the importance of teacher professionalism, school leadership, and cultural consistency in implementing character education. Educational policymakers can use these findings to design professional development programs that enhance teachers' moral pedagogy and encourage collaboration between Islamic and public schools. This integrative approach can promote national cohesion while respecting religious and cultural diversity.

However, the study acknowledges several limitations. The research was conducted in two schools within a single district, limiting the generalizability of findings. The qualitative nature of the study also means that interpretations depend on the researcher's subjectivity and the depth of participant responses. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods or longitudinal design to measure the long-term impact of character education policies on students' behavior and attitudes across diverse regions. Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable insights into how both religious and public institutions can effectively cultivate character education within their respective frameworks, reinforcing education's central role in shaping ethically responsible citizens aligned with Indonesia's national educational vision.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that MI Hidayatul Insan and SDN 3 Matesih successfully embed character education as a central part of their school culture, yet through different frameworks that align with their respective institutional visions. MI Hidayatul Insan applies a faith-based habituation model grounded in Islamic principles, emphasizing spirituality, sincerity, and

discipline. In contrast, SDN 3 Matesih adopts a civic-participatory approach consistent with the Kurikulum Merdeka, focusing on democratic participation, cooperation, and environmental stewardship. These findings demonstrate that effective character education in Indonesia can emerge from diverse contextual and philosophical foundations, provided core values are consistently modeled and reinforced through both curricular and extracurricular practices. Beyond confirming existing theories of moral formation, the study offers a nuanced understanding that contextually grounded educational cultures can achieve similar moral outcomes through different ideological pathways.

Nonetheless, the research acknowledges several methodological and contextual limitations. The study was limited to two schools within a single district, which constrains the extent to which its findings can be generalized to broader or more diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, as a qualitative case study, the data were largely interpretive and dependent on participants' willingness to share their experiences authentically, which may have introduced subtle biases. The researcher's positionality and familiarity with the cultural and institutional settings may also have influenced the interpretation of themes, despite efforts to maintain reflexivity and transparency during analysis. Additionally, the study focused primarily on teachers' and administrators' perspectives, while students' voices, though present, were not explored in equal depth.

To address these limitations, future research should employ mixed-method or longitudinal designs to evaluate the long-term effects of various character education models on students' moral and civic development across different regions and school types. Comparative and cross-level studies between Islamic and public schools could also provide deeper theoretical insights into how contextual factors shape moral education in Indonesia. Expanding the scope to include teacher training programs, parental involvement, and policy-level influences would further enrich the understanding of how character education functions as an ecosystem rather than a school-specific initiative.

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