

## Post-Pandemic Leadership Strategies: Religion-Based Character Education Through Multicultural Learning

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### Article Info

### ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to determine the right leadership strategy to identify and describe the implementation of character education with various backgrounds of students after the covid-19 pandemic. Multicultural learning aims not only to transmit theoretical concepts about different character traits but also to shape students' character, aligning with the expectations of educators. This study used an ex post facto qualitative design characterized by retrospective data analysis. Data gathering methods included observation and case studies. Sources of the data were principals, teachers, students, and parents. The research findings indicated that character education implementation among students of diverse backgrounds emphasizes cultivating virtues rooted in religious practices. Teachers exemplify positive character traits, such as respect for teachers, peers, and younger siblings, as integral aspects of daily life. Moreover, students are encouraged to greet others with a smile, fostering a culture of politeness and warmth in interactions with teachers, peers, and individuals beyond the school environment. An additional exemplary program has been implemented, the mandatory Qur'an program for every student. Despite the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic, the emphasis on character education has not diminished compared to face-to-face schooling; instead, it has increased. Teachers diligently oversee students' character development from the start of their day until its conclusion. The role of the school principal is very supportive of the ongoing character education initiatives within the school. Furthermore, amidst the covid-19 pandemic, school principals have enacted policies to provide internet quotas, facilitating communication with students and ensuring the seamless continuation of positive character development practices, even within the home environment.

## INTRODUCTION

Character education is an educational process that not only teaches theoretical concepts about various good or bad traits but also aims to influence students' characters in the positive direction expected by educators as the ultimate goal of learning (Agih, 2015; Syah, 2020). In people's lives, character problems can become serious issues if they are not nurtured from an early age. Nowadays, there is a moral degradation in the character of the nation, evidenced by the emergence of juvenile delinquency cases, lack of respect for parents, the use of gadgets at an early age, and other issues occurring in both urban and rural areas. This phenomenon is a sign of problems that must be addressed immediately, especially through the field of education, from basic education to higher education (Brooks & Mutohar, 2018).

In various countries, good character education is the result of an educational process that begins in childhood starting from family education, elementary school to high school levels that have been equipped with good teachings and guidances from the environment, especially parents and teachers (Aslan & Zhu, 2015; Ata Akturk et al., 2017; Hakim & Untari, 2018). Therefore, one solution

to the problem of the degradation of the nation's character is to instill good characters as early as possible so that later it will actually be applied in everyday life (Al-Huneidi & Schreurs, 2012). The role of schools in educating and shaping children's character must always be carried out and improved so that children's characters can be well-formed according to the school's plans. Additionally, the role of parents in supervising their child's learning process at home is crucial to aiding the school in shaping the child's character. This is especially important given the rapid development of technology, such as the internet, smartphones, and other devices, which can be accessed by anyone at any time.

In reality, the development of this technology has significantly given both positive and negative impacts (Alkouatli, 2018; Pala, 2011; Ruzaini & Nurhalin, 2020). Based on its function, character education must be carried out in a planned manner to guide students to form good characters as expected (Alrasheedi & Almutawa, 2020). The process of forming character's values can be done through interaction between students and teachers in the learning process in which teachers use appropriate learning methods so as to form good characters in students (Aoki, 2010). If the student's background is relatively homogeneous, then the character education process can work well. However, new problems will arise if students have different backgrounds (Becker et al., 2017).

In fact, in Indonesia, both its people and nation have a high level of diversity, ranging from social, cultural, political aspirations, to economic dimensions. This diversity directly affects the ability of schools and teachers to carry out character education. Therefore, the actual design of teaching materials, curricula and learning methods have been prepared to be applied to the community or students with multicultural backgrounds (Azra, 2019; Bandura, 1986). Nationally, schools are designed to provide education and learning experiences for students that are applicable to all ethnic groups in Indonesia. Therefore, the contents of the curriculum, materials, and learning methods prepared by the government can still be tailored to each region. This reflects a commitment by educational institutions or schools to shape the characters of their students. In fact, the school's efforts in teaching multicultural education have been carried out in new ways and methods. (Khan et al., 2019) stated in his findings in the field that character education in schools is carried out through habituation activities and good character examples. The habituation and exemplary activity starts with the teacher first having to understand and then apply it in everyday life (Huda et al., 2019, 2020). Furthermore, the teacher conducts habituation and good character example for students or students at school, especially at the elementary school level. The results are quite good, namely the students imitate the good characters that are instilled by the teacher in the process of learning activities at school (Munif et al., 2021; Utami & Wafi, 2020).

Khan et al. (2019) states the same thing; the implementation of character education at the elementary school level starts from the lowest level to the highest level so that students behave well. Furthermore, character education in schools is carried out by habituation of dhuha prayer, dhuhur prayer in congregation, reading yasin and tahlil, smiling when meeting the teachers and being polite to the teachers. This is done regularly and spontaneously to cultivate good character traits in every situation. Moreover, cultural aspects such as smiling, greetings, courtesy, and manners are taught and practiced by students automatically, without the need for explicit instruction from the teacher. This forms part of a character-building activity program implemented by madrasas (Hidayah, 2018).

In 2019, the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic brought grief to the entire global population, disrupting all segments of human life on earth, including education. Many countries, including Indonesia, made the decision to close schools, from basic education to colleges and universities. This crisis really came suddenly, forcing governments in any part of the world, including Indonesia, to make a bitter decision, namely closing schools to reduce human contact massively. However, in order to save human life and to maintain economic sustainability, schools still have to open with the risk of being overshadowed by the covid-19 virus outbreak that hits them all the time (Capone et al., 2017; Cleary & Kitsantas, 2017; Creswell, 2015).

At the end of 2021, the covid pandemic outbreak began to slow down, some community activities returned to operation without exception in education. Some schools have returned to carry out character education and learning activities in schools. There are also those who carry out

education during the covid-19 pandemic through online learning. [Dent and Koenka \(2016\)](#) stated that learning during the covid-19 pandemic was carried out in their respective homes by continuing to communicate through chat applications on social media. In addition, the teacher also communicates with parents in order to monitor their children in carrying out the character education process implemented by the teacher. The online learning is carried out by the use of Google Meet application. Some learning activities use this application and some learning activities are carried out in schools, face to face ([Diani et al., 2019](#)).

Character education has been implemented in elementary schools since their establishment. The school principal formulates various concepts for character education activities conducted in elementary schools ([Druckman & Ebner, 2018](#)). The forms of application of character education in elementary schools are very prominent. Every day, each student must perform the Dhuha and Dhuhr prayers in congregation, memorize several Quranic surahs, be proficient in Tahlil, and develop the habit of reciting prayers before and after studying. These activities are aimed at instilling good character through religious practices. Furthermore, students come from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, which makes teaching character education challenging. It requires the teacher's dedication, understanding of each student's character, and patience in guiding them toward developing good character.

Since the covid-19 pandemic, it has been difficult to carry out character education for students. Even though learning is done remotely online, it can still run well. Even based on temporary interviews with school principals, teachers teaching character education are getting busier in controlling student activities with the covid-19 pandemic. The teachers' activities start from waking up at dawn and communicates with students by asking and reminding them whether they have performed the dawn prayer through social media chat applications. The activity continued with other character education activities at night before bed, including reminding students to read prayers before bed. This is the advantage of activities owned by Islamic elementary schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah), which are not widely carried out by educational institutions or schools of the same level. Therefore, this phenomenon is interesting to be the subject of research in implementing character education through multicultural learning, especially after the covid-19 pandemic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Basic Character Education and Character Education Partnership (CEP) In Schools

In language, character can be interpreted as traits, dispositions and habits. According to ([Farah, 2013](#)) if seen from the problematic point of view, education is an existential problem based on transcendental anthropology with a method called existentialistiko phenomenology, that educational phenomena include: (a) education while living together; (b) education that transcends action; (c) presentation of the problem; (d) education and human existence. The educational process involves actions that are not inherently educational, resulting in a gap between education and the actions through which education is manifested.

Meanwhile, in terms of character meaning put forward by Thomas Lickona, character is "A reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way." Furthermore, he added, "The character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior." ([Van Garderen et al., 2018](#)). According to Lickona, good character comprises knowledge about goodness, which then leads to a commitment (intention) towards goodness, and ultimately results in actual actions of goodness. In essence, character encompasses a combination of knowledge (cognitive), attitude (attitude), and motivations, which are subsequently translated into behaviors and skills ([Güçyeter et al., 2017](#)). Based on Character Education Partnership (CEP), character development in a person requires collaboration between individuals and communities ([Hartati et al., 2019](#)). Character education is seen as a long process in helping someone to find good characters, in terms of understanding, caring, and action.

Furthermore, as a guide for educators and the community, CEP develops 11 principles of character education ([Hofman & Hofman, 2011](#)): 1) Actively promoting core ethical values (agree on

and actively promote core ethical values); 2) Helping all academics to have an understanding, concern, and action on core values (help the whole school understand, care about, and act upon core values); 3) Incorporating core values into all phases of school life (Incorporate core values in all phases of school life); 4) Encouraging all academics to have a caring relationship throughout the school; 5) Providing opportunities for each student to act according to morals (offer student opportunities to practice moral behavior); 6) Integrating ethics with academics/curriculum (integrate ethics with academic); 7) Developing student motivation (develop student motivation); 8) Involving the entire school staff to become a model (involve the entire school staff); 9) Preparing leaders who are ready to work hard (cultivate leaders to champion the effort); 10) Building cooperation/synergy between schools and parents and communities (partners with parents and communities); 11) Evaluating the results that have been processed (assess results).

### **Principals as Agents of Implementing Character Education Values**

George R. Terry in *Principles of Management*, as quoted by (Kholik, 2017) ten qualities of a superior leader, namely: First, Strength. Physical and spiritual strength is a basic requirement for leaders who have to work in long and irregular hours, and in the midst of situations that are often uncertain (Kusuma et al., 2019; Lafrarchi, 2020; Lestari et al., 2019). Second, Emotional Stability. A good leader has stable emotions, meaning they are not easily angered, offended, or prone to emotional outbursts. They respect the dignity of others, are tolerant of others' weaknesses, and can forgive minor mistakes. This emotional stability is essential for achieving a harmonious and pleasant social environment (Li, S., & Zheng, 2018; Li et al., 2021).

Third, Knowledge of Human Relations. One of a leader's tasks is to promote and develop the talents and potentials of their subordinates, enabling everyone to progress and prosper together. Therefore, a leader is expected to understand the nature, character, and behavior of their group members. This understanding allows the leader to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of their followers and to assign tasks or work appropriately to each individual (Mahfud, 2009). Fourth, Honesty. A good leader must have high honesty, which is to be honest with himself and to others (especially his subordinates). He always keeps his promises, is not "cheating" or hypocritical, can be trusted, and is fair to everyone. Fifth, Objective. The leader's consideration must be based on a clean conscience, so that it is objective (not subjective, based on their own prejudices). They will look for real evidence and the causes of each incident and provide rational reasons for his refusal (Comte et al., 1896; Maskur et al., 2019).

The sixth character, Personal Encouragement from his heart. The desire and willingness to be a leader must arise from within one's own heart, external support will strengthen one's own desire to provide service and self-devotion for the benefit of the people (Maskur et al., 2020; Morrar & Arman, 2017). Seventh, Communication Skills. A leader is expected to be proficient in writing and speaking, easily grasp the intentions of others, quickly understand the essence of external statements, and immediately comprehend the meaning of their team members. They should also be skilled at coordinating various human efforts, integrating different opinions and perspectives to achieve harmony and balance (Munifah et al., 2019).

Eighth, Social Skills. A Leader is also expected to have the ability to "manage" people, so that they can develop their talents and potentials. A Leader can identify aspects of the weaknesses and strengths of each member, so that they can be placed on tasks that match their respective traits (Musayadah & Evi Muafiah, 2021). Ninth, Teaching Ability. A good leader is also expected to be an effective teacher, guiding students (learners) in a systematic and intentional manner (Ngainun, N., 2017; Nuryana, 2019; Nzoka & Orodho, 2014). The goal is for followers to become independent and willing to give their loyalty and participation. Tenth, Technical Skills or Managerial Leadership Skills. A leader must excel in one or several specific technical skills and possess the managerial ability to plan, manage, analyze situations, make decisions, direct, control, and correct unstable situations.

### **Multicultural-Based Learning as A Means of Character Education**



The definition of culture according to experts is very diverse, but in this context, culture is seen in the perspective of its function as a guide for human life. In the context of this cultural perspective, multiculturalism is an ideology that can be a tool or a means to increase the degree of humans and their humanity. Multiculturalism recognizes and glorifies differences in equality both individually and culturally (Ocak & Yamac, 2013; Ozsoy, 2019). Multiculturalism views a society as having a culture that is generally accepted in society whose style is like a mosaic. The mosaic includes all the cultures of the smaller communities that make up the creation of a larger society, which has a culture like a mosaic. the civil rights' movement as a correction to the policy of assimilation of minorities against the long-running melting pot of dominant culture. Pahrudin et al. (2019) argues, multiculturalism is an acknowledgment, respect and justice for ethnic minorities, both concerning universal rights attached to the rights of individuals and their communities that are collective in expressing their culture. Various concepts relevant to multiculturalism include democracy, justice and law, cultural values and ethos, togetherness in equal differences, ethnicity, ethnic culture, religious beliefs, cultural expressions, private and public domains, human rights, community cultural rights, and other relevant concepts (Pintrich, 2000).

Multicultural education comes from two words: education and multicultural. Education is a process of developing attitudes and behavior of a person or a group of people in an effort to mature humans through teaching, training, processes, actions and ways that educate (Pintrich & Others, 1991). On the other hand, education is the transfer of knowledge, while multicultural is etymologically multi which means many or diverse, while cultural comes from the word culture which has the meaning of culture, tradition, politeness or maintenance. The word "education" and "multicultural" gives a terminological meaning as the process of developing all human potentials that respects plurality and heterogeneity as a consequence of cultural, ethnic, tribal and flow of (religious) diversity (Pressley & McCormick, 1995; Ramadhani, 2018). Ramadhani et al. (2019) defines multicultural education as a way of teaching diversity (Roaini & Ansar, 2019). Roick & Ringeisen, (2018) understands multicultural education as an educational strategy that is applied to all types of subjects by using the cultural differences that exist in students such as differences in ethnicity, religion, language, gender, social class, race, ability and age so that the learning process becomes easy. Pressley & McCormick (1995) defines multicultural education as education that respects diversity and accommodates the perspectives of various cultural groups on a regular basis.

The principal of the Islamic Elementary School (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Al-Huda in the Nganjuk district, East Java) is trying to develop a new post-covid-19 culture by emphasizing character education through religious education and good multicultural education. This method was chosen because of its ability to change attitudes, understandings, and skills of the madrasah community about the character and culture of the students. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to develop a leadership strategy to build school culture through multicultural learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah), which are considered resistant to new cultures. It is important to note that the strategy to build a school culture requires the hard work of leaders, trust, resolution, learning, provision of facilities and infrastructure, funds, and human resources that support Madrasa values.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach and an ex post facto design to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects holistically. This is achieved through descriptions in the form of words and language, within a specific natural context, and by utilizing various natural methods (Moleong, 2014; Rosyada, 2004; Sa'adah, 2018). This type of research is a case study research which is defined as a qualitative approach where researchers explore real life, limited systems (cases) by collecting detailed and in-depth data involving various sources of information (Creswell, 2015; Sagala et al., 2019). The reason for using case studies in research is that the phenomenon under study, the problem theme being discussed, is consistently engaging, pertinent, and widely discussed. In this study, researchers must be polite and obedient to the existing regulations to run smoothly and in a calm atmosphere when digging up the information or data we need.

Information data were selected using interview, observation, and documentation techniques. The research subjects interviewed were the principal, two teachers, three students, and their parents. Indeed, the research subjects were selected based on their strategic positions within the school, which constitutes the research's primary focus. Interviews were conducted fourteen times, with each informant being interviewed twice or thrice. This research was carried out for about two months, from March 2022 to June 2022. The results of observations and documentation, such as K-13 curriculum documents, learning documents: syllabus, teaching materials, photos of teaching and learning activities (TLA), and the like, become supporting data. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, applying direct attitudes, and creating a conducive atmosphere to support character education. The interview topics are designed based on a research focus and guided by the principle of an open mind and not an empty mind or strict logic. This research interview focuses on school strategies for shaping children's character in the post-covid-19 pandemic period.

The observation process involves visiting the research location to observe individual activities, the school environment, and objects, namely students and students' guardians. In addition, documentation includes data collection in the form of audio and visuals, which are also obtained from photos or videos of the multicultural learning and implementation process. Data analysis was conducted using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion after the data were collected ([Sahin, 2018](#)). To validate the data, data triangulation techniques were employed to assess the credibility. This involved cross-referencing the data by interviewing multiple subjects with different viewpoints ([Saputra et al., 2020](#)). The research was conducted at an Islamic Elementary School in Nganjuk Regency, East Java, Indonesia. Elementary school students were chosen as the research subject because they can be effectively optimized for character education through religious education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Strategy for Implementing Religious-Based and Multicultural Character Education

Schools as an educational institution is functioned to instill character and self-awareness among the younger generations of their identity, their collective identity and to grow good future citizens in a pluralistic society. Multicultural learning strategies in Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) are educational strategies that utilize the diversity of social, cultural and other backgrounds of students as one of the strengths to form multicultural attitudes ([Sari, 2017](#); [Shah, 2013](#); [Sharma, 2017](#)). This is part of the facilities used to develop and build better multicultural education in Madrasas so that students can apply them in everyday life. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in developing the teaching and learning process not only pays attention to academic education but also education about understanding character, cross-social, cross-cultural needed in community life. Through this strategy, teachers can use various learning strategies optimally, such as lectures, dialogues, observations, simulations, role playing, and case handling ([Aly, 2011](#)). Madrasas can teach lessons about the importance of tolerance and how to respond if there are differences in socio-cultural backgrounds and how to respect, appreciate and develop a social spirit in social life later.

One of the Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) which was founded in 2016 in Nganjuk district, East Java, Indonesia, implements a multicultural and religious-based character education strategy. The school principal explained that the students come from varied backgrounds, encompassing not only families affiliated with the Indonesian Muslim community organization Nahdatul Ulama (NU) but also non-NU families. Furthermore, students come from diverse family backgrounds, including devoutly religious families, non-religious families (where parents rarely perform the five daily prayers), and even incomplete families (such as divorced families). Consequently, the character of Elementary School students varies due to this diversity in backgrounds ([Sinaga et al., 2017](#)).

In this position, Madrasah educational institutions have an important role in character building and developing the ability of students to have good knowledge and attitudes and act professionally in dealing with social life that is increasingly advanced and culturally different ([Khamalah, 2017](#); [Mahmudiyah & Mulyadi, 2021](#); [Sandria et al., 2022](#)). As the main character in the implementation of

multicultural education, teacher's role determines the success or failure of students in understanding and applying it in everyday life (Mahfud, 2009). Likewise, a Madrasa must have a good teacher management strategy so that teachers who teach in Madrasas can have the sincerity to develop various programs of multicultural education activities in madrasas.

Based on interviews with school principals, they already have a character building program for students with religious backgrounds through habituation of religious-based activities (Suryana et al., 2015). The program of activities includes the habituation of dhuha prayer in congregation in the morning, habituation of reading sholawat starting from sayyidul istighfar, sholawat nariyah, prayers, praying dhuha prayer, prayer before and after studying to reading surah Al Waqiah. Then, in class, learning activities are continued according to the Graduate Competency Standards (GCS) that have been formulated. Each class is assigned different learning tasks according to the stages. Starting from grade 1, students have to memorize several short surahs. All grade 1 until grade 6 students must memorize Asmaul Husna (99 names of Allah) and their meanings. In addition, students must also memorize tahlil, Yasin, and surah Al Waqiah, then pray dhuhr in the congregation and finish the prayer followed by worship. In addition, there are still new programs that still need to exist, namely the flagship program. There are excellent program activities, namely the superior study program activities. Each student must be able to recite the Qur'an by reading the holy book Al-Qur'an according to their level. Schools have prepared teachers by increasing their time to teach reciting the Qur'an, even to students who cannot read it. It is a process of habituation to cultivate character, a good habit that teachers instill in schools.

Furthermore, adding information from teachers in the field of civics education (FCE) and thematic ones. In his interview he said that every teacher who teaches must have a strategy in the teaching process so that students do not get bored in their learning. Strategies in the teaching process such as group discussions, questions and answers, quizzes about lessons, and also observations, for example, before teaching a certain material, it is preceded with a quiz about the previous subject matter to make students memorize the previous material. By recalling the memory, students are trained to remember and re-learn the previous subject matter (Susanti, 2018).

A teacher needs to identify the concept of a clear vision and goal regarding multicultural-based character education that is taught and developed in the Madrasa. The point is to provide knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of students and Madrasa residents so that they are able to develop and implement multicultural social values in social life. The implementation of multicultural education in schools has several specifications as stated by (Rosyada, 2004; Thai & Anh, 2017): schools that are committed to developing pluralism must appear to develop an attitude of respect for school activities towards diversity, developing cohesiveness based on the joint participation of several cultural groups, providing maximum opportunities for all groups or individuals (Vonkova & Hrabak, 2015).

In 2019, there was an outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. The spread is increasingly unstoppable with a substantial escalation of distribution, exploring space and time on a comprehensive and fast scale. Covid-19, has transformed into a pandemic and forced humans to limit the space for interaction among humans. Health protocols must be adhered to in the form of social and physical distancing, which is the safest option to break the chain of spread. Without exception, those affected by this global disaster are activities in places of worship, public services, and educational institutions. Character education activities in elementary schools also change by adjusting to environmental conditions in the teaching and learning process.

Initially, learning, habituation, and character cultivation carried out intensively in schools were transformed into education at home. As a result, education and learning activities are required remotely through virtual technology, such as WhatsApp, Zoom Meeting, Gmeet, and others. As a result, teachers' responsibilities have increased, focusing on implementing the character education program by consistently reminding students about routine religious activities and meticulously monitoring each activity. For example, the principal mentioned that teachers inquire about students' dawn prayers every day and dawn, reminding them from waking up until bedtime. Some students are

diligent in praying in congregation and reciting the Qur'an. Then it was continued by reminding the Dhuha prayer, reading surah Yasin, tahlil, reading the Sayyidul istighfar prayer, reciting independently, praying dhuhur in congregation, reading prayers before and after sleep, praying Asr in congregation, reading the Qur'an, praying maghrib in congregation followed by Isha prayer in congregation.

After that, students studied until the specified time and continued reading prayers before bed. Despite the transition to online learning, the time allocated for habituation processes has remained consistent or even increased, as teachers now have the added responsibility of monitoring character-building activities throughout the day and night. The school facilitates teachers with mobile data which is used to communicate with the students. It also aims to foster emotional closeness between teachers and students. Moreover, students from the class of 2020/2021 did not have any face-to-face meetings throughout the year. Although they communicated via cellphone, when first graders returned to school after the pandemic, they acted like kindergartners, while second graders acted like first graders, especially since their parents or older siblings sometimes helped them with their schoolwork. Despite the challenges, there are still some face-to-face meetings, albeit limited, which have been beneficial. Therefore, even amidst the covid-19 pandemic, schools are making efforts to instill character education through the habituation of religious-based activities. There is no reason for teachers or educators to claim that the epidemic has hindered character education habituation activities due to distance learning (Wilson, 2019; Wiratama, 2020). In the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic, educational activities in elementary schools have begun to resume, although not fully returning to normal. The education system is gradually reverting to its pre-pandemic state, with character education activities also being reimplemented in elementary schools.

Based on interviews with religious teachers, character education was planned during the Education program at the beginning of the year or at the beginning of the semester. So, in addition to teaching and learning activities (TLA), character education is also integrated in various subjects in the K-13 curriculum. Among the character habituation actions when coming to school or going home are giving the head bows to the teacher, being kind to all teachers, also socializing well with each other even to the younger level. This is a form of success that has been instilled by the teacher. The teacher must set an example for students to say good things or get used to being kind to others even when the teaching and learning process is in progress.

This activity is in line with the view of humanistic learning theory that is, learning does not only emphasize on the content but also on the process that is oriented towards students as learning subjects. This theory aims to humanize humans; to be able to actualize themselves in life (Hakim & Untari, 2018; Suparlan, 2022). Furthermore, superior programs provided by the government are usually for outstanding students or extracurricular activities in sports or other fields. However, excellent programs are currently offered to improve students' character. So now, students with good potential in the academic or psychomotor fields must also be given excellent programs. Students who participate in this superior program will not only be competent in the scientific field but also excel in the fields of religion and etiquette.

### **The Role of The Principal in The Implementation of Character Education in Elementary Schools After Covid-19 Pandemic**

The principal has a very important role in implementing character education in schools or Madrasas. In the development of multicultural education in madrasas, the principal provides services needed by students, provides guidance to teachers, monitors and helps each other in the application of multicultural education of students into social life. The function of the principal is to create a situation for teaching and learning activities to take place, a program of character building activities through religious-based habituation. As an education leader, the principal is responsible for the conditions and abilities of teachers continuously, must help teachers recognize the needs of the community, develop the curriculum and identify the development of students' abilities in various



aspects of education ([Administrasi, 2020](#)). Principals must also help teachers evaluate Education programs and student learning outcomes and identify the nature and abilities of each teacher.

The principal also makes sure the school is conducive and comfortable by always holding regular meetings to evaluate each learning activity, both in-class and out-of-class learning. In the meeting, the principal asked all teachers to speak and convey their ideas. The principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Al-Huda is not anti-suggestion or input from teachers. All of them are involved in making decisions during the evaluation meeting and the results of the meeting become a shared reflection so that there will always be mutual improvements. Furthermore, in accepting students, the principal accepts all students from various backgrounds, whether they come from the NU community or not after going through the school selection system ([Yıldırım & Akamca, 2017](#)).

Among the principal's policies are reflected in the results of joint meeting decisions, namely the emergence of religious and multicultural character-based programs, such as the Dhuha prayer in congregation, the habit of reading Sholawat starting from Sayyidul Istighfar, Sholawat Nariyah, Prayers, Dhuha prayers, Prayers before and after study, and read surah Al Waqiah. In addition, of course there is also a superior program that is mandatory for every student. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in distance learning, the principal decided that teachers still had to monitor the habits of activities carried out by their students by providing mobile data packages to each teacher so teachers are required to start their duties from waking up until going back to sleep so that they always communicate more closely with students regarding monitoring character cultivation through students' religious habituation activities ([Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009](#)).

Furthermore, from the results of interviews with FCE teachers, principals developed management strategies to determine and decide steps taken to apply multicultural education in Madrasas and can become an added value for the community ([Wilson, 2019](#); [Wiratama, 2020](#)). Therefore, teacher learning strategies facilitated by Madrasas can develop insight, knowledge, and in-depth understanding of multicultural education so that students have real experience of diversity in social life. As an educational institution, school functions to instill self-identity, character, and collective identity among the younger generation, as well as to cultivate good and educated prospective citizens in a homogeneous or heterogeneous society. If the character is properly embedded, an individual will have a self or collective identity in his future life to solve all the problems he faces, especially cultural issues. Such an individual way of thinking indicates that the school as an educational institution has succeeded in instilling character education in its students.

The expectations of the principal, as stated in the interview, refer to the school's vision, which is to become a center for the development of quality human resources in the fields of science & faith, which are incorporated into the Success of Dhikr, Success of Thought and Success of doing good deeds. Dzikir comes first because we must remember Allah SWT before we learn, which gives us intelligence and brains. Praying and reciting the Qur'an are the following activities. They must be put forward first before being successful. Later, religious knowledge and general science, as well as the sciences of technological development, will be given. Previously, during the pandemic, the principal instructed teachers to use several learning applications during online learning activities. Sometimes, the teachers also made learning videos that were uploaded on YouTube. Then, students learn from their homes, and victorious good deeds are practiced. So, from what has been given in the form of religious knowledge and worship, the general expertise is applied in everyday life to provide students with pious charity in the future. The conclusion is that good deeds are the application of dzikir and thought that are practiced.

### **The Implications of Implementing Religious and Multicultural-Based Character Education for Students and Society**

The implication is the consequence of implementing a program or policy that is not good or good for those targeted by the program or policy. From the perspective of learning outcomes, multicultural education has three goals that are developed for each student. First, cultural identity development is a competence that students have to identify with a specific ethnicity. This competency

includes knowledge, understanding, and awareness of ethnic groups, as well as the creation of pride and self-confidence as members of certain ethnic groups. By providing students with a sense of ethnic and cultural identity, students will have the self-confidence and awareness to maintain their culture. Second, interpersonal relations, namely the competence to have relationships with other ethnic groups, are always based on equality and equity, and they stay away from prejudice and stereotypes. By training students to carry out interpersonal relationships, students will later maintain good relationships with other ethnic groups and respect and appreciate each other.

Third, empowering oneself is an ability to continuously develop what one has in relation to multicultural life. By knowing the facts of a multicultural society, students will be able to develop themselves by adapting to the culture of a plural and broad society. Regarding cultural competence and how these competencies are formed, Wilson (2019) proposes a model of developing cultural competence as cultural competence is formed by various factors: mastery of knowledge, critical thinking, critical power, ability to develop something, and practical ability. These four factors are not static but dynamic, continue to move and form cultural competence. Multicultural education is also very relevant to democratic education in a plural society like Indonesia, which emphasizes the understanding of multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multicultural which requires new construction of justice, equality and a democratic society.

## CONCLUSION

Character education is an educational approach that teaches theoretical concepts about good and bad character traits and seeks to influence students' character in the direction educators expect. Islamic Elementary Schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah) have students from various backgrounds. In practice, these schools implement character education by instilling good character traits and fostering their habitual application in everyday life. Among the activities are: 1). Instilling good character in students by setting examples. Teachers greet and smile at students when they meet them and do the same when interacting with fellow teachers. The students then imitate this habit. Additionally, teachers line up at the gate to greet students with a salam as they arrive at and leave school. When students shake hands, their heads are lowered, 2). Familiarize good character in religious activities by doing the Dhuha prayer, reading the Sayyidul Istighfar prayer, reading the Yasin and Tahlil, reading the Prayer before and after studying, performing the Dhuhur prayer in congregation, listening to motivation, teacher advice after praying in congregation, and conducting a superior program, namely the Qur'an for every student. When the covid-19 pandemic occurred, which required distance learning activities from their respective homes, the principal gave the policy to constantly monitor students' habituation activities of good character. Then, each teacher was provided with an internet quota or mobile data that could be used to communicate with their students and monitor these activities. Character cultivation and habituation activities for elementary schools mostly stayed the same during the covid-19 pandemic and went smoothly according to the school's vision and mission.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing a new culture within an educational institution that consistently and continuously implements character education requires several vital elements. These include the enforcement of policies, the use of gentle methods, the involvement of competent implementers who adhere to the values of goodness, and the creation of the most favorable combination of these factors. Valuable school branding and newly appointed programs through concrete and applicable experiences are also essential. Forming religious-based character education with multicultural learning can elevate institutions' existence and positively impact a developing global society. The results of this research remain relevant for further investigation and exploration, as multiculturalism within society and related themes will continue to evolve alongside advancements in technology and changes over time.

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