



Leadership Strategies In Building A Moral Culture And Facing Ethical Challenges In Madrasah Tsanawiyah

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how strategic leadership plays a role in the institutionalization of moral behavior and how the process of adaptation and ethical challenges are formed in a religious-based secondary education environment. The method used is a qualitative approach with a case study design through data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification to produce systematic findings. The results of the study indicate that strategic leadership is a major factor in the formation of an ethical culture through formal policies, daily habits, and a structured monitoring system. Ethical challenges arise from differences in student discipline levels, inconsistent implementation of rules, and the influence of the social and technological environment. On the other hand, student behavioral adaptation is formed through routine habits, teacher role models, and strengthening the internal social control system. The implications of this study indicate that the success of the formation of a moral culture is highly dependent on consistent leadership, the integration of values in the learning system, and the collaboration of all educational actors in building a sustainable and measurable ethical ecosystem within educational institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of madrasah education governance in Indonesia shows increasing complexity in ethical aspects and strategic leadership at the level of religious-based secondary education units (Juharyanto & Arifin, 2025; Lathifah et al., 2025; Mispani et al., 2026) . Moral issues in educational institutions are no longer limited to the internal realm of schools, but have a direct impact on public trust, the quality of learning services, and the legitimacy of Islamic educational institutions (Buanaputra et al., 2022; Hasan, 2025; Munifah et al., 2025) . Many madrasahs face increasing demands for transparency, accountability, and integrity from parents, the community, and the government (Nawas et al., 2024; Rofiqi et al., 2026; Romlah et al., 2025) . This condition indicates that institutional ethics not only functions as an internal norm but also as an indicator of the quality of educational governance. Therefore, studies on strategic leadership and strengthening moral values are important to understand how educational institutions build stable and sustainable ethical systems.

The main problem faced in the context of madrasah education is the uneven implementation of institutional moral and ethical values across various educational units (Buchanan et al., 2022; Kamali et al., 2024; Mattar, 2022) . Many madrasahs have formal rules and codes of ethics, but their implementation remains administrative and has not fully become part of the organizational culture (Fındıklı, 2022) . This inconsistency is influenced by differences in understanding, weak supervision, and a lack of integration between policies and daily learning practices. Teacher work pressure and administrative demands also often affect the consistency of ethical values implementation within the school environment. This condition indicates a gap between formal rules and actual behavior in the field, which has the potential to impact the overall quality of education.

Field observations indicate that the implementation of ethics in madrasahs remains partial and not fully integrated into the school management system. Frequent cases relate to discipline, academic integrity, and irregularities in administrative and learning management. On the other hand, some madrasahs have attempted to implement internal monitoring systems and digitize administration, but their effectiveness still depends heavily on the role of the principal. Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping an ethical culture, but implementation often faces limitations due to bureaucratic structures and limited resources. This suggests that the institutionalization of moral values has not yet been fully implemented and requires a more systematic approach.

Previous research has shown that educational leadership is closely related to the formation of an ethical culture in schools (Ballangrud & Aas, 2022; Banwo et al., 2022; Ryu et al., 2022) . Transformational leadership has been shown to increase teacher commitment and strengthen organizational values in educational settings (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Hermanto et al., 2024; Kareem et al., 2023) . Several studies have also highlighted that the existence of a code of ethics and a monitoring system can help reduce moral violations in schools (Abankwah et al., 2026; Evangelista, 2025; Klimova et al., 2023) . However, most of these studies still focus on normative aspects and have not examined in depth how the process of internalizing moral values occurs as a structured system. Furthermore, the integration between strategic leadership and ethical implementation mechanisms is still rarely discussed comprehensively in the madrasah context.

The research gap is evident in the lack of studies that systematically link strategic leadership and the institutionalization of moral behavior in madrasahs. Many studies only discuss leadership or ethics separately, without examining the relationship between the two in shaping organizational culture. Furthermore, there is limited research examining how school policies are consistently implemented in daily practice by teachers and education staff. This highlights the need for more in-depth studies of the mechanisms by which an ethical culture is formed, not only formally but also internalized in organizational behavior.

This study offers novelty by integrating the concepts of strategic leadership and the institutionalization of moral behavior within a comprehensive analytical framework within the madrasah environment. This research views ethics not merely as formal rules, but as a value system formed through leadership processes, organizational communication, and internal oversight. The primary focus of the study is how madrasah principals are able to transform moral values into consistent organizational cultural practices. This approach is expected to contribute to the development of a more applicable ethical governance model in the context of Islamic education.

The research problem formulation in this study focuses on how the strategic leadership of madrasah principals influences the process of internalization and institutionalization of moral values in the educational environment. The basic assumption of this study is that the effectiveness of an ethical culture is greatly influenced by consistent leadership, clear policies, and integrated oversight mechanisms. When these three elements operate in harmony, a moral culture will be formed stably in the madrasah environment. Conversely, discontinuity between these elements can create a gap between formal rules and actual practice. This study is expected to provide a conceptual framework that can be used to strengthen ethical governance in madrasahs systematically and sustainably. This research's contribution lies in developing an understanding of how strategic leadership plays a role in shaping institutional moral culture in madrasahs. The results are expected to serve as a reference for madrasah principals and policymakers in strengthening organizational ethics systems. In addition, this study also provides a conceptual basis for the development of educational policies that are more oriented towards integrity, accountability, and the sustainability of organizational culture in Islamic educational environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative design with a case study approach to in-depth examine how strategic leadership plays a role in the institutionalization of moral behavior in madrasah environments. This approach was chosen because it can explain complex social processes, interactions between actors, and the implementation of ethical values in real-world contexts. The case study was used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the leadership practices of madrasah principals in shaping a structured moral culture. The research focused not only on formal policies but also on daily practices that reflect students' discipline and moral values. This approach provides a more in-depth analysis of the dynamics of religious-based educational institutions.

The research location was MTs Nurur Rahmah, chosen because it implements a structured and consistent Islamic value-based character development system. The

school has a moral habituation program that includes time discipline, congregational worship, and moral strengthening through learning and extracurricular activities. The location was chosen based on the relevance of the research context to the study's focus on the institutionalization of moral values. These conditions allowed the researcher to directly observe how leadership policies are implemented in daily educational activities. MTs Nurur Rahmah serves as a suitable representative for examining the relationship between leadership strategies and the formation of an ethical culture at the madrasah level.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted with the madrasah principal, teachers, and education staff to obtain information on policies, the implementation of moral values, and the leadership strategies employed. Observations were conducted on learning activities, students' daily activities, and habituation programs reflecting ethical values. Documentation studies included madrasah regulations, work programs, and activity records related to character development. These three techniques were used to obtain complementary data and provide a comprehensive picture of the field conditions.

Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification to ensure the findings are systematic and valid (Okoko et al., 2023; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024; Susanto & Jailani, 2023). Data condensation was carried out by filtering important information from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus. Data reduction was carried out by grouping data into categories of strategic leadership, implementation of moral values, and student behavior. Data display was arranged in the form of a thematic narrative to facilitate the identification of patterns of relationships between categories. Data verification was carried out through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure data consistency in the field. This process resulted in a comprehensive picture of how moral values at MTs Nurur Rahmah are institutionalized through the strategic leadership of the madrasah principal.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Institutionalization of Ethical Behavior through Strategic Leadership in Madrasah Management Teams

These findings reveal how the strategic leadership of the principal of MTs Nurur Rahmah shaped the institutionalization of moral behavior through a structured system of policies, practices, and supervision. In this context, institutionalization of ethics is understood as the internalization of moral values and discipline, not merely normative but also integral to the madrasah's operational system. This process encompasses the integration of Islamic values into learning policies, regulations, and school culture, consistently implemented by all elements of the institution.

Interviews with madrasah principals indicate that establishing moral codes cannot occur without strong leadership. Informants stated that madrasah principals actively develop and direct policies that emphasize student discipline and morality across all school activities. These policies are not merely administrative in nature but also aimed at shaping student character through daily practices. Researchers interpret the role of madrasah principals as a normative control center, ensuring that moral values are not limited to policy documents but are implemented in daily educational

practices.

Interviews with teachers indicate that Islamic moral and ethical values have been integrated into learning activities and madrasah regulations. Teachers conveyed that every learning activity is always linked to student character development, such as time management, responsibility, and politeness. Researchers interpret that the integration of moral values in learning creates consistency between students' cognitive and affective aspects, so that education focuses not only on academics but also on behavioral development.

Observations show that madrasah activities reflect the implementation of structured moral rules, such as morning assembly, the practice of greetings, congregational prayer, and monitoring student discipline. Each activity is carried out routinely and on a schedule with direct supervision from teachers and madrasah officials. Researchers interpret these practices as demonstrating the existence of a formal and informal social control system that shapes student behavior. This reinforces the notion that moral values have become part of institutional routines.

Based on the research findings, the institutionalization of ethics at MTs Nurur Rahmah is achieved through a combination of strategic leadership, written regulations, and integrated daily practices. Moral values are not merely understood as rules but have become part of the school's organizational culture. The principal plays a key role in ensuring the consistent implementation of values across all activity units. This process demonstrates that the success of ethical institutionalization depends heavily on consistent leadership and a structured oversight system.

Research data shows a pattern that strategic leadership is a key driving factor in the formation of an ethical culture in madrasahs. Formal regulations such as rules and codes of ethics are only effective when supported by regular practice and supervision. Another emerging pattern is the strong link between the integration of values into learning and changes in student behavior. The more consistent the practice, the more stable the level of student discipline in daily activities. This pattern suggests that the institutionalization of ethics is not spontaneous, but rather formed through a systematic process involving leadership, regulation, and repeated social practices.

Table 1. The Role of Educational Actors in the Implementation of Strategic Leadership and Institutionalization of Moral Behavior in Madrasah

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Head of Madrasah	"We formulate rules of discipline and moral development so that they become a culture, not just written rules."	Strategic leadership in moral policy formation
Teacher	"We always link learning with moral values such as discipline, responsibility, and manners."	Integration of ethical values in the learning process
Homeroom teacher	"Habits such as greetings, congregational prayers, and morning roll call are carried out every day and monitored regularly."	Habituation and strengthening of students' moral behavior

The data in Table 1 shows that the institutionalization of moral behavior at MTs Nurur Rahmah is shaped by three main actors: the principal, teachers, and homeroom teachers. The principal acts as a policy director, establishing the structure of rules and a culture of discipline. Teachers act as implementers, integrating moral values into the

learning process. Homeroom teachers serve as direct supervisors, ensuring that habits are consistently instilled in students' daily activities. This combination of roles demonstrates the existence of a hierarchical and coordinated ethical governance system.

The patterns emerging from the data indicate that the effectiveness of ethical institutionalization is significantly influenced by consistent implementation at all levels of the organization. Formal policies do not stand alone but are reinforced through practice and direct supervision in the field. The integration of strategic leadership, learning processes, and daily routines forms a stable system of moral control. This situation suggests that the successful formation of ethical behavior in students depends on the synchronization between institutional policies and systematically repeated social practices.

Patterns of Ethical Challenges and Moral Behavior in the Madrasah Environment

This sub-finding describes patterns of ethical challenges and moral behavior among students at MTs Nurur Rahmah that emerge in the dynamics of daily school life. These patterns encompass varying levels of ethical understanding, student discipline, and the influence of the social and technological environment on moral behavior. Ethical challenges do not occur as isolated incidents, but rather form recurring patterns in the form of violations of rules, differences in discipline among students, and inconsistent implementation of rules by the school.

Interviews with teachers revealed that one of the main challenges stems from differences in students' levels of discipline and ethical understanding. Teachers reported that some students possess a strong moral conscience, but others frequently commit violations such as being late to class and lacking discipline in religious practices. Researchers interpreted this as indicating a gap in the internalization of moral values influenced by family background, social environment, and level of control at home.

Interviews with homeroom teachers revealed that rule enforcement often experiences inconsistencies due to the differing roles of teachers, homeroom teachers, and the principal. Informants reported that each party has a different approach to handling student violations, resulting in variations in discipline implementation. Researchers interpret this lack of synergy as creating a gray area in the oversight system, impacting the effectiveness of student behavior control within the madrasah environment.

The findings suggest that ethical challenges originate from students' internal differences, which are then amplified by external factors such as their social environment and technology use. The influence of digital media is evident in changes in student interaction patterns, leading to greater freedom and less control outside of school. This situation increases the complexity of supervision because student behavior is shaped not only within the school environment but also outside the institution. This flow demonstrates a direct relationship between individual, institutional, and environmental factors in shaping students' moral behavior.

Observations showed that the most frequent violations were late arrivals to class, lack of adherence to congregational worship activities, and violations of school rules, such as wearing inappropriate attributes. Significant differences in discipline levels were observed in several classes, particularly in classes with less stringent

teacher supervision. Researchers interpreted this variation as indicating differences in the effectiveness of social control across class units within the madrasah.

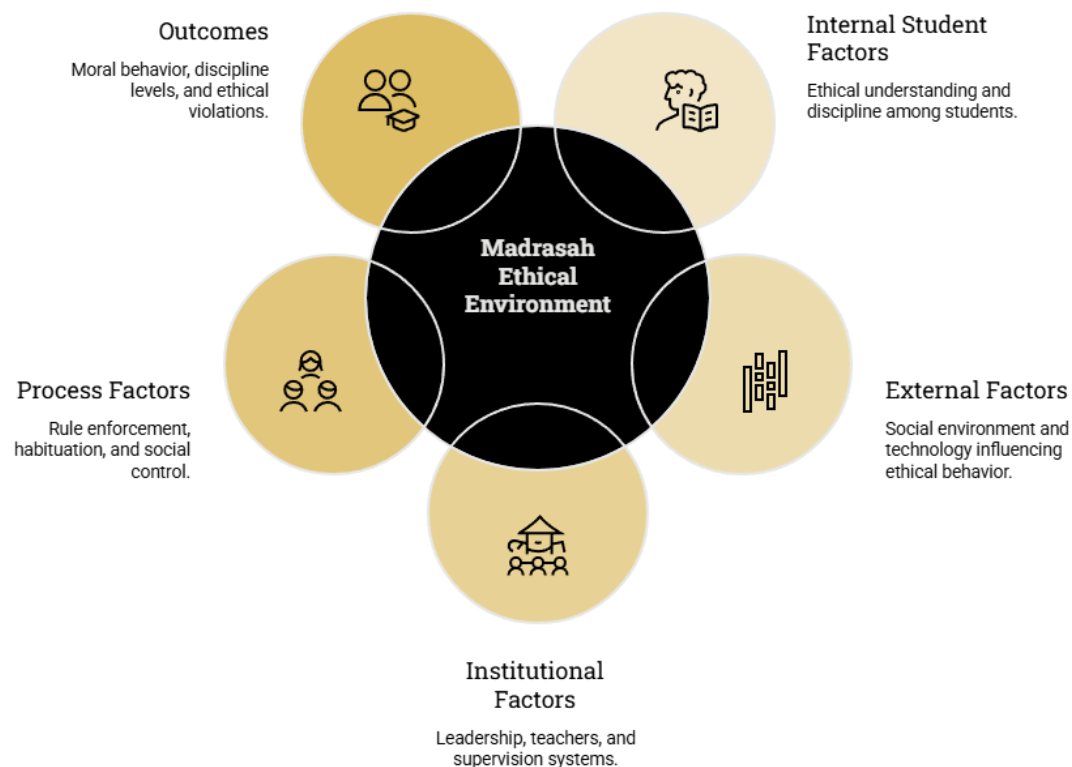


Figure 1. Madrasah Ethical Environment Model

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual model of the ethical environment in madrasas, placing the " *Madrasah Ethical Environment* " at the center of the system. The central circle indicates that the formation of students' moral behavior does not occur in isolation but is influenced by several interconnected components. The five surrounding elements represent the main actors and systems: students, the learning process, the school's social structure, the governance system, and the madrasah's institutional environment. Each element plays a role in shaping, directing, and reinforcing ethical values through ongoing interactions. This model emphasizes that students' moral behavior is formed through the integration of education, leadership, supervision, and school culture, which operate systematically within a single madrasah ecosystem.

Based on the research results, the emerging pattern indicates that ethical challenges at MTs Nurur Rahmah are multidimensional and influenced by interactions between individuals, organizational structures, and the external environment. Weak coordination between educator roles exacerbates inconsistencies in rule enforcement. This situation suggests that student moral behavior is determined not only by formal rules but also by the quality of supervision and the consistency of value implementation across all levels of the institution.

The data show a pattern that student discipline imbalances arise from two main sources: internal variations in ethical understanding and inconsistent institutional oversight. The more asynchronous the roles of teachers, homeroom teachers, and principals, the greater the variation in violations that occur in the classroom. External factors such as the social environment and technology reinforce changes in student

behavior beyond the school's control. This pattern confirms that ethical challenges are not isolated but are shaped through complex interactions between individuals, oversight systems, and the broader social environment.

Behavioral Adaptation and Ethical Compliance in Madrasah Practices

This sub-finding describes the process of behavioral adaptation and ethical compliance among students at MTs Nurur Rahmah as a result of the implementation of habituation, strengthening moral values, and a structured monitoring system. Behavioral adaptation is understood as a change in student attitudes formed through madrasah routines, such as the habituation of greetings, congregational prayer, morning assembly, and compliance with school regulations. Ethical compliance does not only emerge as a response to formal rules, but develops into habits that are internalized in daily activities.

Interviews with teachers showed that student compliance increased when moral values were not only conveyed theoretically but also reinforced through role models in the learning process. Teachers stated that integrating moral values into the subject matter helped students understand the relationship between knowledge and behavior. Researchers interpreted that teachers' role as role models significantly contributed to shaping consistent student behavior, particularly in terms of discipline and responsibility within the madrasah environment.

Interviews with homeroom teachers revealed that a culture of discipline is fostered through a system of daily supervision and routine student discipline reports. The informant explained that every student violation is recorded and followed up through direct coaching. Researchers interpret this oversight mechanism as creating an internal social control system that encourages students to be more cautious in their behavior, as every action has documented consequences.

The findings indicate that changes in student behavior begin with routine habits, which are then reinforced by teacher role models and the school's monitoring system. The character-building program serves as a reinforcement, connecting normative values with real-life practices in students' lives. Collaboration between teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents is a crucial factor in maintaining consistent ethical behavior. This flow demonstrates that ethical compliance is not formed instantly, but through a structured, iterative process of adaptation.

Observations showed that students were more disciplined in participating in routine activities such as morning greetings, congregational prayers, and roll calls, especially in classes with active teacher supervision. Discipline reports showed a decrease in the number of violations after the character development program was consistently implemented. Researchers interpreted that the stability of ethical compliance was greatly influenced by the consistency of rule implementation and the involvement of all parties in the student development process.

Based on the research results, the emerging pattern indicates that student behavioral adaptation occurs through a mutually reinforcing combination of habituation, role modeling, and supervision. Ethical compliance becomes more stable when rules are not only formal but also internalized through daily practice. This situation suggests that behavioral change in madrasahs is the result of a systematic social process, not simply a response to institutional regulations.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the institutionalization of moral behavior at MTs Nurur Rahmah through strategic leadership aligns with ethical leadership theory, which emphasizes the role of leaders as role models in shaping organizational culture (Khofsah, 2025; Rahman, 2026). The finding that the madrasah principal serves as the center of normative control reinforces the concept of ethical leadership proposed in the educational leadership literature, where leaders function not only as decision-makers but also as agents of value internalization. This similarity is evident in the integration of moral values into policies, regulations, and daily habits that form the institutional value system. However, differences emerge in the madrasah context, indicating that religious values serve as the primary basis for the operationalization of ethics, thus making the spiritual dimension a reinforcing factor not always found in general education studies. Theoretically, this finding expands the concept of ethical institutionalization by incorporating the religious dimension as a structural element, not merely a symbolic one.

On the other hand, the pattern of ethical challenges and students' moral behavior aligns with social learning theory, which explains that individual behavior is shaped through interactions with the social environment and authority figures (Rahmadan & Shudiq, 2024; Suhermanto, 2024). Findings regarding differences in student discipline, the influence of the social environment, and technology use reinforce the literature stating that moral behavior is not formed in a single instance but is influenced by multiple factors. Inconsistencies in rule enforcement between teachers and homeroom teachers also align with previous studies highlighting weak institutional coordination as a cause of variations in ethics policy implementation. The difference lies in the intensity of the external influence of digital technology, which in the context of this study is more dominant in shaping student behavior patterns. The theoretical implications suggest that models for analyzing moral behavior in educational institutions need to expand the digital environment variable as a primary determinant.

The findings on behavioral adaptation and ethical compliance align with habituation and behavioral reinforcement theories, which suggest that positive behavior can be formed through repeated activities and social reinforcement. Habitual practices such as greetings, congregational prayer, and morning roll call have been shown to stabilize student behavior, further strengthening the literature on the effectiveness of habit formation in character education. The role of teachers as role models also supports Bandura's behavioral modeling theory, which emphasizes the importance of observation in shaping behavior. However, this study adds context that the success of habit formation depends heavily on the consistency of the institutional oversight system, not just on individual teachers. Practically, these findings suggest that character development programs will be more effective if supported by a documented monitoring system and collaboration between stakeholders.

When compared as a whole, the three sub-findings indicate a mutually reinforcing relationship between strategic leadership, ethical challenges, and student behavioral adaptation (Fanani et al., 2024; Khoiroh et al., 2025). Previous literature tends to separate aspects of leadership, student behavior, and the supervisory system, whereas this study shows that all three form an interdependent cycle of moral institutionalization. The gap found is the lack of integrated analysis linking leadership

policies with student behavioral dynamics within a single systemic model in the madrasah context. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the development of an integrative framework that combines ethical leadership, institutional social control, and habit-based moral behavior formation. Practically, these findings provide a basis for madrasah administrators to strengthen the synergy between madrasah principals, teachers, and homeroom teachers in building a consistent ethical system.

Another practical implication suggests that the success of ethical institutionalization is determined not only by the existence of formal regulations, but also by consistent implementation and oversight across actors. These findings emphasize the importance of a documented disciplinary evaluation system and parental involvement in strengthening students' moral behavior. Furthermore, integrating moral values into learning is an effective strategy for connecting students' cognitive and affective aspects. This research also contributes to the development of an ethical governance model in madrasahs based on systematic habituation and structured social control. Thus, this research enriches the character education literature by emphasizing the importance of alignment between strategic leadership, institutional systems, and social practices in shaping sustainable moral behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that strategic leadership plays a central role in the institutionalization of moral behavior through consistent policies, practices, and monitoring systems at MTs Nurur Rahmah. The key lesson learned is that ethical values cannot stand alone as formal rules, but must be internalized through structured daily practices supported by the principal's exemplary behavior and collaboration between teachers, homeroom teachers, and all school elements. Scientifically, this study contributes to the development of an integrative model linking ethical leadership, institutional control mechanisms, and the formation of a moral culture in the context of madrasah-based education. These findings broaden understanding of the implementation of leadership theory in religious education settings. The study's limitations lie in its focus on a single location, making it difficult to generalize broadly. Therefore, further research is recommended using a multi-case approach and quantitative methods to strengthen validity and expand empirical analysis.

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