

Management of Islamic-Based Character Education Implementation in Vocational Schools

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the management of Islamic-based character education implementation in vocational schools in Indonesia, focusing on how moral values are systematically integrated into school governance. The research employs a qualitative case study approach at SMKN 1 Buahdua, with data collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The participants included school leaders, Islamic Education teachers, and general subject teachers. Data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that school leadership is central yet underutilised in formulating institutional strategies for character education. Despite teachers' efforts, especially from the Islamic Education department, there is a lack of institutional planning documents, such as formal guidelines, performance indicators, or curriculum integration strategies. Leadership fails to transform fragmented teacher initiatives into a coherent management plan. Character education remains unstructured, as general subject teachers receive no formal training, guidance, or coordinated support. Furthermore, challenges in implementation arise from the absence of interdepartmental coordination, inadequate professional development, and unclear conceptualisation of moral goals. Evaluation mechanisms are informal and lack standardised tools, while family and community involvement is minimal, weakening long-term value formation. These findings reflect a managerial deficit in planning, organising, actuating, and controlling (POAC) Islamic character education within vocational settings. To address these issues, the study proposes a management-oriented model encompassing strategic planning, cross-departmental collaboration, structured training, stakeholder engagement, and the development of formative character assessment instruments based on Islamic ethics. This model seeks to institutionalise character education not as a supplementary effort but as a core component of educational management that aligns moral development with vocational excellence.*

Studi ini mengkaji manajemen implementasi pendidikan karakter berbasis Islam di sekolah kejuruan di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada bagaimana nilai-

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nilai moral diintegrasikan secara sistematis ke dalam tata kelola sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif di SMKN 1 Buahdua, dengan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen. Partisipan meliputi pimpinan sekolah, guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI), dan guru mata pelajaran umum. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, yang melibatkan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan sekolah berperan penting namun kurang dimanfaatkan dalam merumuskan strategi kelembagaan untuk pendidikan karakter. Terlepas dari upaya para guru, terutama dari departemen PAI, masih terdapat kekurangan dokumen perencanaan kelembagaan, seperti pedoman formal, indikator kinerja, atau strategi integrasi kurikulum. Kepemimpinan gagal mengubah inisiatif guru yang terfragmentasi menjadi rencana manajemen yang koheren. Pendidikan karakter masih belum terstruktur, karena guru mata pelajaran umum tidak menerima pelatihan formal, bimbingan, atau dukungan terkoordinasi. Lebih lanjut, tantangan dalam implementasi muncul dari tidak adanya koordinasi antardepartemen, pengembangan profesional yang tidak memadai, dan konseptualisasi tujuan moral yang tidak jelas. Mekanisme evaluasi bersifat informal dan tidak memiliki perangkat standar, sementara keterlibatan keluarga dan masyarakat sangat minim, sehingga melemahkan pembentukan nilai jangka panjang. Temuan ini mencerminkan defisit manajerial dalam *Planning, Organising, Actuating, dan Controlling (POAC)* pendidikan karakter Islam dalam lingkungan vokasional. Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, studi ini mengusulkan model berorientasi manajemen yang mencakup perencanaan strategis, kolaborasi lintas departemen, pelatihan terstruktur, keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan, dan pengembangan instrumen penilaian karakter formatif berbasis etika Islam. Model ini berupaya melembagakan pendidikan karakter bukan sebagai upaya pelengkap, melainkan sebagai komponen inti manajemen pendidikan yang menyelaraskan pengembangan moral dengan keunggulan vokasional.

Keywords: *Character Education, Islamic Values, Educational Management, Vocational School, Implementation Strategy.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of globalisation has brought about not only technological progress but also a reshaping of values and educational paradigms. Information flow and mass communication acceleration have had a double-edged impact on many developing countries, including Indonesia. On one side, it promotes modernisation, openness, and global competitiveness. On the other hand, it contributes to weakening cultural identity, erosion of social cohesion, and declining ethical standards. Giddens (1990) famously described this phenomenon as “disembedding,” where traditional structures such as religion, education, and local customs lose their normative grounding amid global flows. More recent studies reaffirm this concern, noting that globalisation, especially in the digital era, has intensified value fragmentation and moral relativism among youth, thereby posing serious challenges to the continuity of cultural and religious identity in

education (Dau & Abatan, 2025; Sulaiman & Othman, 2023). These changes call for renewed attention to educational management that is rooted in local values and religious ethics while remaining responsive to global realities.

These changes are particularly evident in the behavioural patterns of adolescents. Indonesian youth are increasingly exposed to lifestyle trends influenced by global digital culture, often detached from moral and religious foundations. Recent reports show a concerning rise in moral deviation among students, such as disrespect toward teachers, school-based violence, premarital sexual behaviour, and substance abuse. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission KPAI (2023) highlights that these behaviours are increasing, particularly in urban school settings. Supporting this, Pratama & Syaiful (2021) emphasise that weak internalisation of spiritual values and insufficient character education contribute to moral deterioration among junior high school students in Indonesia.

This phenomenon reflects what Lickona (1996) termed "the moral crisis of youth," requiring deliberate and structured educational responses. Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System supports this view by asserting that education must pursue academic goals and shape students' religious, moral, and social capacities. Further policy reinforcement is evident in the national Character Education Strengthening (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter/PPK*) initiative launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2017, which calls for the systematic integration of moral values into school curricula and institutional practices (Mahmuddah & Junaidi, 2025).

While character education remains an essential component of the national education system, its practical implementation poses significant challenges, particularly in vocational school settings. Although conceptual frameworks from both Western and Islamic traditions—such as Lickona's triad of moral development and al-Attas's concept of *ta'dīb* Al-Attas (1999); Lickona (1996) have been widely acknowledged in pedagogical discourse, their application in real school environments is often fragmented and inconsistent.

In Vocational Schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK*), the situation becomes more critical due to the dominant orientation toward producing technically skilled labour. This utilitarian approach often sidelines affective and spiritual dimensions of learning. As a result, character education is frequently treated as supplementary, informal, or even incidental. Teachers may convey moral messages through spontaneous advice or discipline, but rarely within the structure of lesson planning, instructional design, or institutional policy. Moral development often remains confined to Islamic Education subjects, with little integration across other disciplines.

Recent studies reinforce these concerns and offer empirical evidence to support the need for a more systematic, management-oriented character education model in vocational settings. Izzati et al. (2024) conducted an applied network process (ANP)-based study at SMK Muhammadiyah Jakarta and found that the success of character formation is closely linked to strategic quality management that includes teacher professional development, supervision systems, and formative evaluation mechanisms. They argue that character education will not thrive without precise planning instruments, competent human resources, and sustained managerial support.

Similarly, Widodo (2025), in their study on digital-era leadership in SMK, emphasise that the role of the school principal is vital in institutionalising character values. Their

findings show that strong leadership enables the alignment of character education goals with digital literacy, curriculum adaptation, and school culture. The principal must serve as an administrative head and a moral leader who can cultivate a vision of integrity, responsibility, and Islamic ethics in the school environment.

In addition, Marnayana et al. (2024) developed a management character education model based on the Whole School Development Approach in SMK Palopo. Their research and development (R&D) study concluded that holistic character development can be achieved only when all school components—including administration, curriculum, extracurricular activities, teacher conduct, and community involvement—are orchestrated through a unified, institutionalised framework. This comprehensive model addresses the shortcomings of fragmented implementation and provides a replicable blueprint for integrating moral values into every layer of school governance.

These findings collectively underscore the need to move beyond fragmented, teacher-dependent initiatives toward a school-wide system that supports the effective management of Islamic-based character education. Without such structural reinforcement, even the best-designed values will remain theoretical ideals. As such, vocational schools must be supported with leadership capacity, regulatory clarity, teacher training, and parental engagement to ensure that moral development becomes a core, measurable, and sustainable part of educational practice. Character education, especially grounded in Islamic principles, should no longer be treated as a peripheral mission but as a strategic axis of school management.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation management of Islamic-based character education in the context of vocational schools, with a specific case at SMKN 1 Buahdua in Sumedang Regency. The research examines how character values rooted in Islamic ethics are planned, organised, implemented, and evaluated within the school's institutional framework. It also seeks to identify systemic barriers—such as the absence of technical guidelines, limited teacher capacity, and minimal stakeholder involvement—that hinder the holistic integration of character education. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, this study intends to offer a context-sensitive and management-oriented model for institutionalising moral education in vocational settings. The findings are expected to contribute to the academic discourse on educational leadership and character formation, while also providing practical insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and school leaders committed to aligning educational outcomes with Islamic moral values and national character goals.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a single-case study design to examine the implementation management of Islamic religion-based character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua, located in Sumedang Regency, West Java. This study employs a qualitative approach to explore complex educational phenomena in natural settings and understand how institutional, cultural, and pedagogical contexts shape character education practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method was deemed appropriate to investigate this bounded system in detail, focusing on how Islamic moral values are planned, integrated, and assessed within the school's governance and daily activities (Yin, 2018).

Data collection employed three primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. A total of nine informants were selected using purposive sampling, including the school principal, vice principal for curriculum, three Islamic Education teachers, and four general subject teachers. Interviews explored participants' perceptions, strategies, and challenges in implementing character education. Observations were conducted in both classroom and extracurricular religious activities, including congregational prayers, Islamic sermons, and Qur'anic recitation sessions. Document analysis covered lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran/RPP*), school regulations, character development programs, and related policy documents. This triangulated data collection strategy was designed to ensure data richness, contextual depth, and cross-validation of findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The data were analysed using Miles et al. (2014) interactive model, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Thematic patterns were identified through inductive coding, supported by reflective memo writing and pattern matching across data sources. Triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This methodological framework enabled the study to reveal the formal mechanisms of character education implementation and the informal and cultural dimensions influencing its success or limitations. By uncovering how leadership, teacher agency, institutional support, and value integration intersect within the vocational school environment, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Islamic character education as a structured and manageable educational domain.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Management of Islamic Character Education at SMKN 1 Buahdua

The management of Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua reflects how institutional leadership navigates values-based education within the framework of modern vocational schooling. Using the POAC (Planning, Organising, Actuating, and Controlling) model, this analysis shows how management practices shape the direction and quality of character education aligned with Islamic values.

1. Planning: Strategic management for Islamic character education

The interviews with nine informants illustrated that planning for Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua was still fragmented and highly dependent on personal initiatives. The school principal underlined the importance of moral integration, yet admitted, *"A school-wide roadmap has never been drafted; we are still waiting for clear technical guidelines from above, so for now everything relies on individual teachers."*

The vice principal for curriculum confirmed this limitation, noting that *"Our RKAS and curriculum documents do not yet include indicators or targets for character education. It is generally discussed, but not formally written into the school's planning system."* This lack of formal documentation has left teachers without an explicit institutional reference.

The three Islamic Education teachers described their consistent attempts to plan for character development through lesson design. One explained, *"In every RPP I always*

write down moral indicators and insert Qur'anic verses or hadith to guide behaviour, even though there is no directive from the school." Another teacher added, *"We include daily prayers and religious assemblies in our planning, because these are essential for shaping students' behaviour."* Their commitment was evident, but it remained confined to religious subjects.

By contrast, the four general subject teachers acknowledged their lack of guidance in linking academic content with character values. A chemistry teacher said, *"We only focus on cognitive material; there is no guideline on connecting scientific lessons with moral education."* A physical education teacher remarked, *"Sometimes I remind students about discipline or cooperation, but it is not part of my formal lesson plan."* Such statements reveal that general teachers tended to view character education as outside their domain, or at best, something incidental.

Supporting these perspectives, document analysis showed no character education goals in RKAS or development plans, and lesson plans from general subjects rarely mentioned moral indicators. Observations further revealed the contrast: Islamic Education teachers prepared religious routines such as congregational prayers and Qur'anic recitations in advance, while general subject teachers gave occasional moral reminders depending on classroom situations.

The findings suggest that planning for Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua remains unstructured, fragmented, and heavily teacher-dependent. The absence of technical guidelines, institutional planning documents, and cross-departmental strategies prevents character education from being consolidated into a school-wide vision.

Effective management begins with strategic planning, which involves defining a shared vision, setting goals, and taking actionable steps. At SMKN 1 Buahdua, the data reveal that this phase remains fragmented and individually driven. While Islamic Education teachers independently embed character values within their RPP (lesson plans), general subject teachers lack a formal framework or guidance, resulting in inconsistent planning across the curriculum. No evidence of school-wide documentation (e.g., School Development Plan or RKAS) specifying character education goals or performance indicators indicates a significant lack of centralised planning.

The absence of official technical guidelines (*juklak/juknis*) confirms that planning is not institutionally mandated but left to teacher discretion. Such fragmented planning contradicts principles highlighted by Saepudin (2023), who emphasises that successful Islamic character education requires participatory planning that connects spiritual-intellectual goals with pedagogical and managerial structures. Similarly, a study by Rifki & Januar (2024) confirms the need for systemic planning across all school documents—curriculum, extracurricular, and budgeting—to reflect institutional commitment to moral values.

Although the Ministry of Education established the PPK program in 2017 to strengthen character education, data show that SMKN 1 Buahdua has not integrated these values purposefully into strategic documents or KPIs. The lack of explicit inclusion of character development within the national competency framework weakens general teachers' ability to contribute meaningfully. Consequently, Islamic character education remains informal, unmonitored, and highly dependent on personal initiative.

The principal's role becomes central in addressing this gap: transforming isolated teacher efforts into an organised strategic plan for character education—a pending task. Ideally, school leadership should initiate a cross-departmental planning team to co-create a character education roadmap covering annual goals, performance indicators, resources, and alignment with national Islamic character profiles (*Profil Pelajar Pancasila*). Without such strategic planning, character education risks being symbolic rather than embedded in institutional culture.

2. Organising: Structuring roles and responsibilities in character education

The interviews with the nine informants indicated that the organisational aspect of character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua has not yet been formally structured. The school principal acknowledged this, stating, *"So far, no official decree or team specifically assigned to manage character education; it is still considered part of religious activities."* He admitted that responsibility remains concentrated on Islamic Education teachers.

The vice principal for curriculum confirmed this condition, noting that *"There is no organisational map or formal division of labour for character education. We only follow routines, and the system has not yet involved general subject teachers or counsellors in a structured way."* This statement revealed that cross-departmental coordination is missing.

The three Islamic Education teachers described themselves as the de facto coordinators of character education, mainly through lesson planning and religious routines. One teacher remarked, *"We are the ones who prepare the daily prayers and Qur'an recitation schedules; other subject teachers are not systematically involved."* Another added, *"When there are activities like Islamic sermons or moral campaigns, they usually come from us, not from a joint committee."* This shows that the burden of organising falls almost entirely on Islamic Education teachers.

Meanwhile, the four general subject teachers stated they had not been given explicit roles in character education. A mathematics teacher admitted, *"I have never received an assignment letter to integrate or organise character values in my teaching."* A physical education teacher explained, *"I sometimes give advice about teamwork or discipline, but there is no formal coordination with Islamic Education teachers or school programs."* These accounts illustrate the absence of structured delegation across departments.

Document analysis further supported these testimonies. Neither the RKAS nor internal policy documents contained organisational charts or job descriptions related to character education. Lesson plans from general subject teachers also lacked sections on coordinated character-building tasks.

Observations of extracurricular and daily school activities revealed that religious programs such as congregational prayers, Islamic sermons, and Qur'anic recitations were well organised. However, they functioned as isolated routines rather than parts of an integrated school-wide program. Other staff members, such as counsellors or extracurricular coordinators, were not seen as active participants in organising character education.

Overall, the findings suggest that the organising function in character education remains informal, centred on Islamic Education teachers, and lacks institutional mechanisms such as a dedicated team or task force. This absence of structured roles and

responsibilities hinders the school's ability to make character education a collective effort.

As a key function of management, organising involves delegating tasks, coordinating personnel, and establishing formal structures to support program implementation. In the context of Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua, findings reveal a significant lack of organisational integration. The division of roles remains informal, with the responsibility for character education largely falling on Islamic Education teachers. These educators serve as the primary agents for moral instruction through structured lesson plans and religious routines. However, general subject teachers are not systematically involved in the initiative, leading to a fragmented approach across the curriculum.

There is no evidence of a formal task force or cross-disciplinary committee to oversee character education. The absence of such a body indicates that the school leadership has not fully institutionalised the program. This gap in organisational structure reflects the findings of Suyadi & Sutrisno (2022), who argue that Islamic-based character education requires an integrated system involving all staff members, including administrators, counsellors, and non-academic personnel. Without a clear organisational map or shared responsibility, character education becomes siloed within religious instruction, reducing its school-wide impact.

Moreover, the principal has yet to issue formal decrees or internal policies to delineate responsibilities related to character development. Effective organising would require school leadership to establish a dedicated character education team comprising representatives from all departments with clear job descriptions, timelines, and performance indicators. Such a structure not only distributes the workload but also fosters shared ownership, a factor Hasanah & Permana (2020) show to be crucial in embedding moral values across learning domains.

The lack of synergy also manifests in extracurricular coordination. While some religious activities exist—such as communal prayers and Islamic sermons—their execution lacks strategic integration with classroom learning. Consequently, the organising function at SMKN 1 Buahdua does not yet fulfil its potential in operationalising Islamic character education as a collaborative institutional endeavour.

3. Actuating: Mobilising teachers and leaders in character implementation

The interviews with the nine informants revealed that the actuating function—mobilising teachers and leaders to carry out character education—was still uneven across the school. The school principal stated, “I try to set an example by joining congregational prayers and greeting students every morning, but not all teachers consistently follow these practices.” His role was perceived more as symbolic leadership through personal modelling rather than systematic mobilisation.

The vice principal for curriculum admitted that no formal coordination or monitoring system existed to ensure every teacher implemented character education. He explained, *"So far, we have not conducted regular meetings or provided training to motivate general subject teachers to apply moral education in their lessons."* This revealed the absence of structured institutional mechanisms to support actuating.

The three Islamic Education teachers reported actively incorporating character education in lesson plans and daily classroom activities. One teacher mentioned, *"In every class, I remind students about discipline, honesty, and prayer obligations. We also*

monitor students during congregational prayers and Qur'an recitations." Another emphasised, *"We try to motivate students not only through teaching, but also by guiding their behaviour outside the classroom."* These efforts, however, were mostly limited to religious studies.

By contrast, the four general subject teachers admitted their low level of involvement. A mathematics teacher confessed, *"We rarely insert character values; sometimes I remind students about honesty during exams, but it is not systematic."* A vocational subject teacher added, *"Our focus is more on technical competence. There has been no training on integrating Islamic values into practical subjects."* Their testimonies suggest that actuating character education was not seen as a shared responsibility.

Document analysis supported these accounts, showing no evidence of formal coordination frameworks, teacher training modules, or professional development programs related to character education. Observations during school activities confirmed the gap: while Islamic Education teachers and school leaders actively led communal prayers and Islamic assemblies, general subject teachers were passive participants, rarely taking the initiative to reinforce values within their lessons.

Overall, the findings highlight that the actuating function at SMKN 1 Buahdua remains highly dependent on individual initiative—primarily from Islamic Education teachers and the principal's symbolic role—without institutional structures to mobilise all staff. This imbalance has led to inconsistent implementation of Islamic character education across the curriculum.

The actuating function in educational management refers to efforts mobilising individuals to carry out planned programs effectively. At SMKN 1 Buahdua, implementing Islamic character education largely depends on teachers' commitment and individual initiative—especially Islamic Education teachers—while general subject teachers remain less involved. This discrepancy reflects the absence of systemic coordination and institutional motivation mechanisms across departments.

While Islamic Education teachers actively integrate character values into their lesson plans and classroom activities, other subject teachers often view moral education as outside their core mandate. As a result, character education is enacted programmatically in Islamic subjects but remains incidental and unsystematic in general lessons. This finding aligns with (Andrianto et al., 2025), who note that in many vocational schools, teachers outside religious studies frequently lack orientation and support to infuse ethical dimensions into their pedagogy.

The school principal plays a limited yet symbolically important role in actuating values through personal modelling, such as initiating communal prayers and embodying respectful behaviour. However, as shown by Khasanah et al. (2022), modelling alone is insufficient unless it is accompanied by consistent reinforcement, supervision, and institutional support structures. At SMKN 1 Buahdua, there is no formal coordination strategy that ensures all teachers implement character education in a consistent, measurable manner.

Furthermore, there are no standardised frameworks or professional development programs to train teachers to internalise and teach Islamic moral values within their respective disciplines. This lack of pedagogical empowerment contributes to low engagement among non-Islamic Education educators, mirroring concerns raised in a

study by Falah et al. (2025) that found affective education remains peripheral in vocational curricula focused on technical competence.

The school must develop structured mentorship, inter-departmental collaboration, and regular coordination meetings to strengthen actuating efforts. These help bridge the gap between religious values and academic instruction and ensure character formation is embraced as a collective institutional responsibility.

4. Controlling: Monitoring and evaluating character outcomes

Interviews with the nine informants showed that monitoring and evaluating Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua remain informal and unsystematic. The principal admitted, *"We usually discuss student behaviour during general meetings, but there is no special instrument to evaluate character outcomes."* He explained that reports focused mainly on academic achievement, while moral aspects were left to incidental observations.

The vice principal for curriculum echoed this point, stating, *"Character development is not part of our formal reporting format. We rely on teacher impressions or cases when problems occur, but we do not have systematic records."* This indicated the absence of institutionalised tools for ongoing monitoring.

The three Islamic Education teachers often relied on daily interactions to assess students' attitudes. One said, *"We watch how students behave during prayers or Qur'an recitations. If they are disciplined and respectful, we take that as success."* Another noted, *"There is no scoring rubric; evaluation is just based on our impressions."* These accounts suggest that religious routines function as informal evaluation tools without documentation or structured follow-up.

By contrast, the four general subject teachers admitted rarely conduct character-related assessments. A mathematics teacher stated, *"I only notice when students cheat or show laziness, but I do not have an instrument to record such behaviour."* A vocational subject teacher added, *"We never put character values in student report cards. Our focus is still technical skills and competencies."* Their testimonies reflect the marginalisation of affective domains in evaluation practices.

Document analysis reinforced these findings: student report formats emphasised academic and vocational competencies, with no dedicated section for character assessment. Minutes from coordination meetings showed that while behaviour issues were sometimes discussed, they were treated as disciplinary cases rather than as part of a structured evaluation framework.

Observations at school confirmed that monitoring often occurred reactively. Teachers responded to incidents such as tardiness or misconduct, but there was no longitudinal tracking of student attitudes. Moreover, the absence of follow-up mechanisms meant that discussions during teacher meetings seldom translated into policy refinement or program adjustments.

Overall, the findings indicate that the controlling function at SMKN 1 Buahdua is intuitive, mainly undocumented, and dependent on individual teacher perceptions. Without standardised instruments, systematic documentation, or structured feedback loops, character education remains weakly monitored and challenging to evaluate as part of the school's overall educational outcomes.

The controlling function in character education management refers to the systematic process of monitoring, evaluating, and refining efforts to achieve intended moral and ethical outcomes. At SMKN 1 Buahdua, the control mechanisms for Islamic character education remain largely informal and inconsistent. Monitoring is typically conducted through general teacher meetings, anecdotal observations, or reactive interventions rather than structured assessment tools or continuous quality assurance systems.

There is currently no standardised instrument to evaluate character development across subject areas. Teachers rely on subjective impressions or spontaneous behavioural incidents to assess student conduct. This informal model aligns with the findings of Handayani & Kholis (2024), who argue that moral behaviour in vocational schools is often evaluated through intuition rather than evidence-based assessment, leading to limited data for meaningful reflection and policy improvement.

Furthermore, student behaviour is not systematically documented in a way that allows longitudinal tracking or pattern analysis. This absence of data undermines the school's capacity to diagnose problems, measure progress, or determine the efficacy of character programs. The evaluation of affective domains is often excluded from school reporting formats, as these are primarily focused on academic and technical skills. This observation is reinforced by research from Zuhdi (2022), highlighting the marginalisation of character metrics in vocational school evaluations due to policy gaps and a lack of administrative commitment.

Another significant challenge lies in the feedback loop between teaching, monitoring, and policy refinement. Although the school conducts periodic teacher coordination meetings, discussions on character education are rarely prioritised or followed up with targeted improvements. This disconnect mirrors the broader trend found by Mavuso et al. (2024), who observed that many schools in Indonesia treat character education as peripheral, lacking a sustainable planning, implementation, monitoring, and revision cycle.

To enhance the controlling function, the school must adopt evidence-based monitoring instruments, integrate affective assessment into routine evaluations, and train educators to document behavioural indicators. Institutionalising this process would increase the effectiveness of character education and align the school's moral development agenda with measurable educational outcomes.

The findings of this study reveal that the success of Islamic character education in vocational schools hinges not merely on pedagogical implementation but primarily on the strength of its managerial foundation. Weaknesses in strategic planning, unstructured role distribution, inconsistent execution, and a lack of evaluation tools indicate a systemic gap in how school leadership governs character formation. Rather than treating moral education as a supplementary concern, school management must institutionalise it as a core organisational agenda, embedded in structured planning, interdepartmental coordination, and continuous monitoring. As Mavuso et al. (2024) noted, character education must shift from rhetorical commitment to managerial priority to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Obstacles in Managing Islamic Character Education

Despite clear policy mandates, SMKN 1 Buahdua faces systemic managerial barriers that undermine the institutionalisation of Islamic character education, reflected across planning, pedagogical integration, and external engagement.

1. Lack of Guidelines

Interviews with the nine informants consistently highlighted the absence of formal operational guidelines (*juklak/juknis*) for character education. The school principal admitted, *"We have never received specific technical instructions from higher authorities. Teachers use their own initiative."* Similarly, the vice principal for curriculum explained, *"Our school documents, such as RKAS or curriculum plans, do not include clear references for character education. We rely on general statements only."*

The three Islamic Education teachers described how they individually embedded moral values in their lesson plans. One remarked, *"We write indicators for honesty, discipline, and respect in our RPPs, but it is only based on our own awareness, not on school directives."* On the other hand, the four general subject teachers openly admitted that they lacked direction. A chemistry teacher stated, *"There is no guideline on how to link chemistry lessons with Islamic values. We do not have reference documents for that."*

Document analysis confirmed these testimonies: neither the RKAS nor lesson plans from general subject teachers contained structured character indicators. Observations also showed that while Islamic Education teachers organised religious routines such as prayers and Qur'an recitations systematically, general subject lessons rarely included planned moral integration, instead relying on spontaneous advice when situations arose.

A primary challenge is the absence of formal operational guidelines (*juklak/juknis*) that clearly integrate character values into pedagogical and administrative frameworks. While Islamic Education teachers embed values in their lesson plans, general subject teachers lack coherent direction or reference materials (Susilo et al., 2022). This aligns with findings in Indonesian schools where national character policies struggle to translate into school-level pedagogical tools (Zuhdi & Hidayatullah, 2020). Fullan (2020) emphasises that educational reform falters not due to insufficient vision but due to incoherent execution. At SMKN 1 Buahdua, this challenge manifests as fragmented and teacher-dependent implementation.

2. Content Disconnect

The interviews with general subject and vocational teachers revealed significant challenges connecting technical content with character education. One vocational mechanics teacher admitted, *"It is hard to relate motorbike repair lessons with honesty or religious discipline; the students only focus on practical skills."* An IT teacher expressed a similar concern: *"When I teach programming, I do not see how to insert Islamic values directly. There is no clear method for that."* These testimonies suggest that teachers in technical domains often view character education as irrelevant or outside their professional mandate.

In contrast, the Islamic Education teachers reported that while frequently reminding students about discipline and honesty, they noticed little reinforcement from vocational classes. One explained, *"We guide students in prayer and ethics, but when they enter*

technical workshops, the focus shifts purely to machines and tools, without moral context.”

The school principal acknowledged this gap, remarking, *“Our vocational teachers are competent in their technical subjects, but we have not yet trained them on how to integrate values into those lessons.”* Similarly, the vice principal for curriculum confirmed that no pedagogical framework had been developed to help technical instructors link their content with moral outcomes.

Document analysis further supported these findings: lesson plans from mechanics, IT, and other vocational subjects rarely contained indicators related to character development. Observations of workshop sessions showed that teaching centred on technical skills such as machine handling, coding, and safety procedures, with little explicit emphasis on moral or spiritual dimensions.

Vocational educators express difficulty aligning technical content with moral values. Teachers in fields like mechanics or IT report that character education seems irrelevant to their domains (Judijanto et al., 2024). This disconnect echoes findings from Amilda et al. (2023); Norma et al. (2023), highlighting vocational educators' struggles to integrate ethics in training programs. Moreover, successful in general education, the RECE model struggles to adapt to technical curricula (Astawa et al., 2025). Students receive disjointed moral messages without pedagogical bridges, undermining holistic character development.

3. Community Gaps

The interviews revealed that parental and community engagement in character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua remains weak. The principal acknowledged, *“Parents rarely follow up on what we instil at school. Once students go home, the routines are not continued.”* He further noted that attempts to collaborate with local religious leaders or community organisations had been sporadic and lacked sustainability.

The vice principal for curriculum confirmed this limitation, stating, *“We organise school-based religious activities, but there is no structured program to involve parents or the surrounding community. Communication usually happens only when there are disciplinary problems.”*

The Islamic Education teachers echoed these concerns. One explained, *“Students pray and recite Qur’an here, but when they are at home, many parents do not encourage the same practices. This weakens the impact of what we teach.”* Another added, *“We have proposed inviting community figures for joint activities, but it has not become a routine collaboration.”*

Meanwhile, the general subject teachers also noticed the gap. A mathematics teacher remarked, *“When values are not reinforced at home, it is difficult for us to maintain them in class.”* A vocational teacher added, *“Sometimes parents only focus on grades or technical skills, not students' attitudes.”*

Document analysis showed no formal school-community partnership agreements or parental involvement programs addressing character education. Observations during school events revealed that while students actively participated in prayers, Qur’an recitations, and sermons, parental attendance and community participation were minimal, often limited to end-of-year or ceremonial occasions.

Parental and community engagement remains minimal. Although the school organises spiritual routines, these are seldom reinforced outside school. Studies by Alfiyanto et al. (2024); Mahanani et al. (2022) reinforce that lacking community support diminishes moral education efforts' longevity and depth. Without active external partnerships, character education becomes a school-bound initiative rather than a shared societal value-nurturing process.

To provide a clearer synthesis of the findings and discussion, Figure 1 illustrates the management of Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua through the four managerial functions (POAC). The diagram depicts the input (teachers, students, documents, and community), the process (planning, organising, actuating, and controlling), and the resulting output (Islamic character formation). Each stage also highlights the practical challenges identified in the field, which explain why the overall outcomes remain limited and inconsistent.

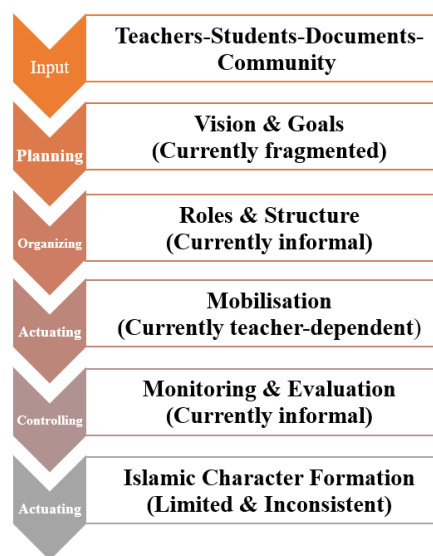


Figure 1. Flow diagram of Islamic character education management (POAC) at SMKN 1 Buahdua

Solutions for Managing Islamic Character Education

In response to the obstacles identified in implementing Islamic-based character education at vocational schools, several strategic solutions have been adopted, albeit with varying degrees of institutional support. One of the most significant drivers of success has been teacher initiative. Teachers of Islamic Education have often gone beyond mandated duties to instil moral values through curricular integration and informal modelling. Studies suggest that when educators are empowered with a sense of moral responsibility, they become pivotal agents in sustaining value-based learning environments (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2014). In many contexts, this involves embedding Islamic virtues within everyday pedagogical encounters, not only during religious lessons but across various disciplines (Lickona, 1996).

Modelling behaviour also emerges as a crucial approach. School leaders and teachers serve as role models whose conduct communicates the school's value framework more effectively than formal instruction alone (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). The principle of *qudwah hasanah* (exemplary conduct), deeply rooted in Islamic pedagogy, supports this emphasis on moral imitation and consistent ethical behaviour (Al-Attas, 1999).

Leadership commitment to daily rituals such as congregational prayers, communal greetings, and routine reflections strengthens the moral climate of the institution (Marzuki et al., 2024). Moreover, schools that provide regular forums for moral reflection—through student assemblies, sermon sessions, or project-based moral learning—demonstrate improved student moral reasoning and behaviour (Czerny, 2025).

Parental and community engagement is also central to reinforcing character development. When parents and local religious leaders collaborate with educators, the school culture becomes more integrated and holistic (Epstein, 2010). Such engagement ensures that moral values are reinforced not only in the classroom but also at home and in the broader social context (Sholekah & Rozi, 2025). Furthermore, some schools have overcome the absence of formal guidelines by developing internal charters and community-approved codes of ethics (Halstead, 2004). These locally crafted frameworks, though informal, can serve as practical reference points for managing character programs (Diana et al., 2024).

IV. CONCLUSION

The management of Islamic character education at SMKN 1 Buahdua reveals a fragmented and informal approach that limits the institutionalisation of moral values across the school environment. From a managerial perspective, the strategic planning phase lacks centralised coordination. At the same time, Islamic values are mentioned in the lesson plans of Islamic education teachers, and general subject teachers operate without systematic guidance or institutional directives. The organising function is similarly weak, as character education remains primarily the responsibility of Islamic Education teachers, without a clear division of roles among staff or the formation of interdisciplinary character education teams. The actuating stage demonstrates sporadic implementation, where moral modelling by teachers and school leaders occurs, but without consistent classroom strategies. Although several educators strive to embed values through personal example and classroom culture, these efforts are often uncoordinated and lack school-wide reinforcement. Meanwhile, the controlling aspect of character education remains underdeveloped, with evaluation relying on informal teacher meetings and observational feedback rather than standardised tools or measurable indicators of student moral development. This study concludes that the sustainability and effectiveness of Islamic character education in vocational settings depend on comprehensive and structured management. Strengthening leadership commitment, designing collaborative programs, establishing inter-subject coordination mechanisms, and developing reliable assessment instruments are essential steps. Character education risks becoming an incidental rather than a transformative institutional strategy without strong managerial integration.

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