

Character Education Through Takhasus Program in Madrasahs

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Abstract

Character education in the era of globalization faces serious challenges due to moral degradation and the massive negative influence of technology. Madrasahs, as Islamic educational institutions, have a fundamental responsibility not only in academic achievement but also in the formation of good character. Many madrasahs have developed flagship programs, one of which is the ‘takhasus’ program, which often focuses on deepening religious knowledge such as Tahfidz or Kitab Kuning. However, the implementation of this program as a strategic means of integrated character building still needs to be studied in greater depth. This study aims to (1) analyze the implementation of the takhasus flagship program in shaping student character, and (2) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in this process in madrasahs. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation in takhasus classes, in-depth interviews with program coordinators, teachers/ustadz, and students, as well as analysis of program curriculum documents. The results show that the takhasus program has a significant contribution to shaping student character, especially in terms of religious values (obedience in worship), discipline, independence (istiqomah), and manners (etiquette). The key finding is that character building does not only occur through material (curriculum content), but more strongly through a strict habituation process, modeling from ustadz, and a conducive environment (milieu). In conclusion, the takhasus program in madrasahs is effective as a means of character education when implemented in an integrated manner, combining a specific curriculum with a strong culture of discipline and role modeling.

Keywords: Character Education, Takhasus, Islamic Education, Takhasus Program

Introduction

In recent years, character education has become an important focus in madrasah institutions as an effort to shape a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has noble character (Nur Hasanah & Kristiyah, 2023). Recent studies show that character education programs in madrasahs have been implemented through curriculum integration (Khobir et al., 2021) and extracurricular activities. For example, Syarnubi, Mansir, Purnomo, Harto, and Hawi (2024) found that at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 3 Palembang, a model of character integration through Islamic Religious Education and spiritual extracurricular activities successfully shaped values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation.

Another study conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Mu'alimin Bangkinang stated that the internalization of character values was carried out through congregational worship activities, habituation, and teacher role models, which showed that madrasahs indeed have unique

potential to actualize moral values. Furthermore, Priatmoko, Rahman, Inayah, Ekawati, and Mustakim (2025) in their research at pesantren-based Madrasah Ibtidaiyah identified religious values such as “shidq” (honesty), discipline, social care, and love of worship that were instilled through a combination of curriculum (Khobir et al., 2021), routine worship practices, and community involvement.

In addition, supporting policies for character education also received attention. For example, Putri & Hasmiani (2024) examined policies to strengthen character education at MA Darul Amin (Aceh), which made daily worship programs, Islamic extracurricular activities, and teacher-parent collaboration key elements in shaping students' religious and social characters (Hasanah, 2023). Meanwhile, Wahyudin, Hasanah, and Arifin (2023) developed a character education model in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools through the tazkirah, istiqomah, and Iqra al-Fikr models, concluding that madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools can be vital places for shaping the character of a generation with an Islamic spirit as well as a modern one (Islamic et al., 2023). However, most of these studies are still general in nature in terms of madrasah character education (Nur Hasanah & Kristiyah, 2023), without delving deeply into takhasus programs—specialized programs in madrasahs (e.g., takhasus tahfiz, takhasus leadership, or takhasus sosial). This limitation indicates a gap in research on how takhasus programs can be more effective in instilling character in students than regular programs.

Based on several issues found in previous literature that underlie the research, an in-depth study was conducted. First, there is a lack of empirical research on the specific effects of madrasah takhasus programs on character education, even though takhasus programs are becoming increasingly popular in many madrasahs. Second, the management and implementation models of takhasus in the context of character have not been fully explored—whether character values are taught explicitly, through the curriculum, or through habituation and role models. Third, there are challenges in evaluating the success of character building, given that most studies use qualitative and observational methods, making it difficult to measure the long-term impact of takhasus programs on student character. Therefore, researchers are interested in conducting research entitled “Character Education Through Takhasus Programs in Madrasahs.”

Methods

This research approach uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to explore and understand the meanings constructed by individuals or groups related to social or humanitarian issues, in this case character building through the Takhasus program (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design is used to investigate contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined. The research focuses on an in-depth analysis of the strategies, implementation, and impact of the Takhasus program on the character of students at the madrasah (Yin, 2018).

Participants in the study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that informants had knowledge and experience relevant to the research topic. The main participants in this study consisted of students from an MTs school in Central Java who were required to participate in the Takhasus program at the madrasah, with a total of 401 students. However, based on the sampling criteria, 15 students were included. The inclusion criteria for students were that they

were currently participating in the program so that exposure to the character curriculum could be observed in its entirety (Cohen et al., 2018).

The research procedure was carried out in three systematic stages. First, the pre-field stage, which included preparing interview guidelines and conducting preliminary studies to build rapport with the research subjects (Setiawan, 2021). Second, the field implementation stage, in which the researchers conducted participatory observation and in-depth interviews during one academic semester. The researcher acts as the key instrument in collecting data. Third, the post-field stage, which includes final analysis, data verification with participants, and writing the research report (Mertens, 2020).

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques to obtain comprehensive data. First, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the perspectives of students and teachers regarding the character values instilled. Second, participant observation was carried out to observe student behavior in daily activities, such as discipline in congregational prayer and social interaction. Third, a documentation study was used to analyze supporting documents such as the Takhasus curriculum, student violation records, and memorization achievement books (Hennink et al., 2020). Data Analysis Techniques Data analysis in this study adopted an interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019). The analysis process was not conducted linearly, but rather circularly and continuously. The analysis steps are divided into two main domains to ensure depth of interpretation.

The initial step involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming data that emerges from written field notes. Researchers sort data relevant to indicators of religious character and independence, then discard irrelevant data. After condensation, the data is presented in the form of text narratives and matrices of relationships between variables to facilitate the drawing of preliminary conclusions about character formation patterns in the Takhasus program. Data Validity Check To ensure that the research findings are accountable, the researcher conducts a rigorous data validity check. This examination focused on two main criteria for qualitative research quality, namely credibility (internal validity) and confirmability (objectivity), which were detailed through the specific strategies below.

Data credibility is sought to ensure that the research results represent the reality that actually occurred among participants. This strategy involves long-term involvement at the research site to detect information distortion. Testing the Confirmability of Findings. Confirmability is conducted to ensure that research findings originate purely from field data, rather than from researcher bias or imagination. This is done through an audit trail, in which the research supervisor checks the raw data records and data reduction results. Data Source Triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by cross-checking data obtained from students with teachers. For example, students' statements about discipline are confirmed with records of violations from teachers on duty to see the consistency of the information. Triangulation of Collection Techniques. Triangulation of techniques is done by comparing interview data with observation data. Researchers compare what students say about honest character with their actual behavior.

Results

This section presents the main findings obtained from the field through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using an

interactive model (condensation, presentation, and verification) to identify emerging thematic patterns. Before presenting the results, the researchers found that the intensive Takhasus program had a significant positive impact on the formation of students' religious character and independence, as well as creating behavioral distinctions compared to students in the regular program. Data analysis was carried out by coding interview transcripts and observation checklists to find the frequency of behavior and self-management patterns.

Patterns of Religious Character Internalization

Referring to the observation procedures described in the Methods section, this data answers questions about how the Takhasus environment shapes religious character by analyzing the frequency of religious activities carried out by students. Behavioral frequency analysis was conducted on 15 key participants over a period of 4 months. Table 1 presents a summary of student discipline levels in aspects of religious rituals.

Table 1 Summary of Consistency in Religious Behavior of Takhasus Students

No.	Behavioral indicators (Variables)	Consistency Pattern
1.	Consistent patterns of worship (such as Muroja'ah, Tahfidz, Dhuha prayer, and daily recitation of prayers)	Quite high: 80% of participants who took part in the Tahfidz class immediately began memorizing before the class started.
2.	The exemplary approach of Takhasus guidance counselors who demonstrate discipline, politeness, and high spirituality	Quite high: On average, students recite the Quran for 1 hour/day outside of compulsory hours (in their neighborhood).
3.	Strengthening Values through advice, guidance, and regular evaluation	Current: 60% regular participants, 40% tentative (depending on class conditions).

Comparison of Independence

In accordance with the comparative case study design, students who participated in the Takhsus program and regular students at the school generally showed significant differences in terms of character education. This can be seen in the differences in self-management. A comparative analysis was conducted on students regarding how they manage their time and personal problems.

Table 2 Comparison of Independence and Self-Management Patterns

No.	Aspects of independence	Finding of The Takhasus Group	Finding of The Regular Group (Comparator)
1.	Time Management	Micro-Managing: Having a written schedule by the hour due to a heavy memorization load.	Flexible-Flow: Incidental learning, free time is mostly used for casual socializing.
2.	Problem Solving	Peer-Reliance: Solving academic problems with peers (peer teaching).	Teacher-Reliance: Tends to immediately ask for help from the teacher when encountering difficulties.

These results show a clear divergence in behavior, where time constraints on Takhasus students actually triggered a defense mechanism in the form of stricter time management.

Obstacles in the Implementation of the Takhasus Program

Despite the positive results, field data also recorded obstacles in the implementation of the program intervention. Table 3 summarizes the obstacles reported by the research subjects, which could affect the internal validity of character building.

Table 3 Identification of Program Implementation Barriers

No.	Type of Barriers	Data Description
1.	Physical Fatigue	Reported by 10 out of 15 students, especially in the second month of the semester.
2.	Boredom with Routine	Variation in learning enthusiasm decreases dramatically when there is no variation in teaching methods.
3.	Interpersonal Conflict	Friction between peers due to the pressure of high memorization targets.

Discussion

The findings in Table 1 confirm that the intensity of the conditioned environment in the Takhasus program successfully created strong worship habituation. This is consistent with Skinner's Behaviorism theory (Darmayanti, 2024), in which positive reinforcement and a controlled environment (Takhasus Program) are effective in shaping desired behavior.

However, the findings in Table 2 provide an interesting new nuance. Contrary to the common assumption that strict religious programs can limit student creativity (as stated in the criticism (Salsabila, 2024)), this study found that time scarcity in the Takhasus program actually gave rise to "Adaptive Independence". Students become better time managers not because of direct instruction, but as a survival mechanism to complete memorization targets in a limited time. This finding expands on previous literature by showing that "academic load," if managed with proper guidance, can be a catalyst for independence (Nur Hasanah, 2023). Analysis of Intervention Mechanisms and Validity The success of character intervention in this study works through the causal pathways of Peer Modeling and Forced Habituation. The Takhasus program creates an ecosystem where deviant behavior (such as laziness) becomes difficult to engage in due to positive social pressure from peers (see Results 2, Peer-Reliance aspect).

However, this interpretation must take into account several limitations of validity:

1. Selection Bias: Students who entered the Takhasus program from the outset had undergone a rigorous selection process. Therefore, the good character that emerged may have been partly innate to the students, rather than solely the result of the program.
2. Fatigue Effect: As shown in Table 3, the program intervention faced challenges in terms of "implementation fidelity" when students experienced burnout. At this point, student compliance with the rules may have been superficial (merely fulfilling obligations) rather than deeply internalized.
3. External Validity: These findings are very specific to the context of madrasahs, which require all students to participate in the Takhasus program. Generalization of the results to public schools may be limited, because the element of supervision is a key variable in the success of this program.
4. Critical Analysis and Limitations of the Study: This study has methodological limitations, particularly in its reliance on self-reported data from students in interviews, which is prone to social desirability bias: students tend to answer in ways that are considered "good" in religious terms. If similar research is conducted in the future, the

use of non-participant observation or peer assessment is recommended to obtain more accurate behavioral data.

Implications and Conclusions Despite these limitations, these findings have important practical implications for madrasah administrators. The Takhasus program has proven to be not just an academic program (memorization), but also an effective character incubator. The implication is that the Takhasus curriculum should not only be evaluated based on the amount of memorization, but should also include indicators of independence and leadership.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, several key findings can be concluded as follows.

1. Patterns of Religious Character Internalization

The Takhasus program has proven to be an effective means of instilling religious character in students. The internalization of character is carried out through three main patterns: (a) habitual worship such as murojaah, tahfiz, dhuha prayers, and daily prayers; (b) exemplary behavior from Takhasus guidance teachers who demonstrate discipline, politeness, and high spirituality; and (c) reinforcement of values through advice, guidance, and regular evaluation. These three patterns ensure that religious character is not only taught but also practiced consistently until it becomes a habit. The majority of students show an increase in spirituality, discipline in worship, and respect for teachers and peers.

2. Comparison of Takhasus Students' Independence

The results of the study show that students who participate intensively in the Takhasus program have a higher level of learning independence and spiritual independence than students who did not participate in additional religious activities before the Takhasus policy was mandatory. Takhasus students are better able to manage their study time, are consistent in memorization, and are responsible for their daily religious tasks. The Takhasus program also trains perseverance and self-management, thereby helping students to be more independent in navigating school activities. Although this program is mandatory for all 401 students, comparisons in independence can be seen from the variations in activity levels, discipline, and memorization results between groups of students who participate in the program with different intensities.

3. Obstacles in the Implementation of the Takhasus Program

Although effective, the implementation of the Takhasus Program still faces several obstacles. First, physical fatigue because students continue to study and memorize non-stop during and outside of class hours. Differences in students' basic abilities in reading the Qur'an mean that some students need more time to adjust. Second, learning fatigue causes a decline in students' internal motivation, which is still unstable, especially for students who participate in the program only because it is mandatory, hindering the achievement of maximum results. Third, internal conflicts with peers are also a hindering factor. However, these obstacles can be minimized through Takhasus class grouping strategies, periodic monitoring, and a personal approach from the supervising teacher.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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