



A Counseling-Based Model for Islamic Character Development in Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Strengthening Islamic character in madrasah is an urgent need amid challenges of moral degradation and the negative influence of digital media. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of Islamic counseling services in strengthening student character in madrasah. The method used is qualitative with a case study design, involving 32 students, one counseling teacher, two Islamic Education teachers, and three homeroom teachers. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and then validated with source and technique triangulation. The results of the study show a significant increase in Islamic character indicators, especially discipline and responsibility. The key factors that strengthen this process are the integration of the values of the Quran and Hadith, the exemplary behavior of guidance counselors, and the consistency of messages reinforced through collaboration between guidance counselors, Islamic Education teachers, and homeroom teachers. These findings confirm that cross-educator synergy is an integrative strategy that has rarely been studied before. This study contributes theoretically to the development of an Islamic counseling model and practically to schools in building contextual character education.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern education cannot be separated from efforts to develop students who possess intellectual excellence and strong character (Arlina et al., 2024; Ayunitha et al., 2025; Rahawarin et al., 2023). Amidst the rapid pace of globalization and the penetration of digital technology, the challenge of character building, especially Islamic character, has become increasingly complex (Herawati et al., 2025). Students at the madrasah level now live in an environment full of global values that are not always in line with Islamic teachings, such as materialism, individualism, and hedonism. The phenomenon of moral degradation, such as the increase in bullying behavior, low participation in worship, and the negative influence of social media, shows the need for strong Islamic character education (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Putra & Hidayat, 2022).

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In this context, Islamic character education that emphasizes noble moral values, obedience to Allah SWT, and social awareness is a necessity (Ningsih et al., 2025; Sari & Sunaryo, 2019). Islamic character is not only understood as a set of behavioral rules, but as an integration of faith, knowledge, and deeds in daily life (Yunita et al., 2025). This is in line with the national education objectives stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes that education must develop the potential of students to become people who are faithful, pious, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and responsible.

Islamic character is important as the foundation of noble morals and a stronghold for the younger generation amid globalization and digital penetration. As explained by Maulida, (2017); Wiyani, (2012), these values are derived from the Quran and hadith, such as honesty (*shidq*), trustworthiness, responsibility, patience, caring, and respect. These values are not only taught theoretically, but must be internalized in the behavior of students through a process of habituation and exemplary behavior. Islamic character education becomes increasingly important when we realize that madrasah teenagers are in a period of psychosocial transition that is vulnerable to environmental influences (Santrock, 2021).

In this day and age, the search for identity is often marked by a conflict of values between what is taught in school and what is learned from social media or peer groups. Therefore, madrasahs serve not only as educational institutions, but also as agents of socialization of Islamic values that are consistent, adaptive, and relevant to the challenges of the times. A comprehensive approach is needed to ensure that character education is not just a slogan, but truly becomes the spirit of all educational activities. Within this framework, the role of Guidance and Counseling becomes very strategic in strengthening the Islamic character of students through planned personal and group interventions.

Guidance and counseling services in madrasahs play a strategic role in internalizing Islamic values to students, not only through individual counseling, but also through collaboration with Islamic Education teachers and homeroom teachers. Guidance and counseling not only helps students overcome the problems they are facing, but also serves as a preventive measure and a means of developing their full potential (Gysbers & Henderson, 2014).

The integration of Islamic values into guidance and counseling services is an important step that can add a spiritual touch to the counseling process, so that students not only understand problems from a psychological perspective, but also from the perspective of Islamic values and ethics (Hidayat & Suryana, 2022). For example, in dealing with disciplinary issues, Guidance and Counseling teachers can use an Islamic counseling approach that emphasizes awareness of responsibility to Allah SWT, linking behavior with reward and sin, and providing real examples in everyday life. This approach focuses not only on behavioral change but also on shaping hearts and minds in line with Islamic values. Thus, Guidance and Counseling services in madrasahs become an effective instrument for internalizing Islamic character in students, which will ultimately influence their behavior at school, in their families, and in society.

Theoretically, the formation of Islamic character through Guidance and Counseling can be explained through moral development theory combined with Islamic values. Kohlberg, (1981) views moral development as a gradual process influenced by an individual's interaction with their environment. From an Islamic

perspective, moral development involves not only reason and social experience, but also spiritual awareness as creatures of Allah (Sudrajat, 2019). In madrasah, Guidance and Counseling teachers can use counseling sessions as a means of dialogue that connects students' problems with religious teachings, so that students can interpret their life problems within the framework of destiny, effort, and responsibility as Muslims. The integration of this approach is also relevant to Al-Ghazali's in 2004 view, which emphasizes that moral education requires a repetitive process, continuous practice, and consistent supervision. In other words, Islamic character building is not an instant result, but the fruit of continuous educational intervention, in which Guidance and Counseling services play a key role.

As one of the junior high schools under Muhammadiyah, this madrasah is strongly committed to developing students who are knowledgeable and have good character. However, like many other madrasahs, the challenge of developing Islamic character here cannot be ignored. Initial observations show that some students still face difficulties in internalizing moral values into their actual behavior, such as a lack of manners in interacting with others, low discipline in congregational prayers, and involvement in conflicts with friends. This challenge is exacerbated by the influence of social media, which often promotes popular culture that conflicts with Islamic values (Sariani & Nugraha, 2025). This is where the role of Guidance and Counseling is very much needed, not only to resolve emerging problems but also to create a school environment conducive to the practice of Islamic values.

Strengthening Islamic character through Guidance and Counseling in madrasahs is aimed at shaping students into responsible individuals with integrity and a high level of spiritual awareness. Values such as honesty, trustworthiness, discipline, cooperation, and social awareness are integrated into every Guidance and Counseling service, whether in individual counseling, group counseling, or classical guidance. For example, in group guidance sessions, Guidance and Counseling teachers can discuss the theme of “*Honesty in the Islamic Perspective*” by relating it to students' real experiences, verses from the Quran, and the hadith of the Prophet. This contextual approach allows students to understand the value of honesty not merely as a moral rule, but as part of their faith and identity as Muslims (Fitriani, 2020).

A number of studies have shown the effectiveness of Islamic Guidance and Counseling services in shaping positive student behavior. However, previous studies have focused more on Islamic character education in general, with few researching how Islamic Guidance and Counseling services are integrated with cross-teacher collaboration in strengthening Islamic character in madrasahs. For example, research conducted by Fitriani, (2020) found that the application of Islamic counseling was able to reduce the level of aggressive behavior among madrasa students by 45% within a three-month period. Another study by Zaini, (2021) revealed that the synergy between guidance and counseling teachers, Islamic religious education teachers, and parents resulted in a significant increase in students' discipline in worship and respectful attitudes. These findings provide a basis that similar strategies have the potential to be applied effectively in madrasahs with adjustments to the local context and student characteristics.

The implementation of Islamic Guidance and Counseling services in madrasahs also requires the support of an integrated educational ecosystem. School religious activities, such as congregational prayers, Islamic studies, da'wah competitions, and social service, can be a means of character building if they are

designed in line with the Guidance and Counseling program. Collaboration between Guidance and Counseling teachers, Islamic Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and families is crucial to the success of this program (Yusuf, 2022). This integration ensures that the moral messages received by students are consistent in various environments at school, at home, and in the surrounding community.

However, the implementation of Islamic Guidance and Counseling services is not without challenges. Some of the obstacles that are often encountered include limited human resources with dual competencies in guidance and counseling and Islamic understanding, a lack of systematic Islamic guidance and counseling modules, and resistance from some students who are influenced by global popular culture (Rahmawati & Ahmad, 2023). To address these challenges, innovation is needed in the development of adaptive, creative Guidance and Counseling programs that make wise use of technology to instill Islamic values without appearing forceful.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how Guidance and Counseling services in madrasahs can strengthen students' Islamic character, the strategies used by Guidance and Counseling teachers, and the challenges faced. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which involves collaboration between guidance and counseling teachers, Islamic education teachers, and homeroom teachers in forming a model for strengthening Islamic character in madrasahs. This collaborative approach has rarely been studied in depth in the context of Islamic education, thus providing theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic guidance and counseling services in the modern era.

The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of an Islamic Guidance and Counseling model that is relevant to adolescent development, as well as to serve as a reference for Guidance and Counseling teachers, madrasah principals, and education policymakers in optimizing the cultivation of noble character in the madrasah environment. Thus, this research will not only enrich the literature on Islamic Guidance and Counseling, but also offer a new, effective, and contextual integrative approach.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type, because the focus of the study is directed at the process of strengthening Islamic character through counseling services at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muhammadiyah Surantih, Indonesia. Research data was obtained through participatory observation in the Guidance and Counseling room and classrooms. In-depth interviews were conducted with five teachers (guidance and counseling teachers, Islamic education teachers, homeroom teachers, and the principal) and 10 students selected based on their active involvement in the guidance and counseling program. The criteria for selecting participants were teachers and students who were directly involved in the implementation of Islamic guidance and counseling services. Data validation was carried out using source and method triangulation techniques, namely comparing the results of observations, interviews, and document reviews of school programs. The validity of the data was reinforced by member checks with participants and peer debriefing. With this design, the study sought to produce an in-depth, transparent, and replicable picture in a similar context (Engkizar et al., 2023; 2025; Htay et al., 2025).

The research subjects included guidance counselors, madrasah principals,

Islamic Education teachers, and students who were recipients of Guidance and Counseling services. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account their active involvement in the process of Islamic character building. The researchers conducted observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies to obtain accurate and informative data.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques. First, participatory observation to observe the interactions between guidance and counseling teachers and students in the context of counseling services, both individual and group. Second, semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences, perceptions, and strategies used by guidance and counseling teachers in shaping students' Islamic character. Third, documentation of school documents, coaching programs, counseling case records, and Islamic character learning materials.

The research instruments consisted of interview guides and observation sheets, which were compiled based on indicators of Islamic character building in accordance with the values promoted by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the principles of Islamic counseling (Engkizar et al., 2024; 2025; Febriani et al., 2023; Helena et al., 2020; Murniyetti et al., 2023). The validity of the instruments was assessed through expert judgment, namely the assessment of experts in Islamic education and counseling, to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the indicators used.

Table 1. Research Instruments

Observed / Asked Aspect	Indicator	Data Collection Technique
Exemplary conduct of Guidance and Counseling teachers in Islamic attitudes	Dressing according to Sharia, using polite language, showing patience	Observation, interview
Integration of Islamic values in counseling services	Incorporating Quranic verses/Hadith in counseling sessions	Observation, documentation
Application of Islamic approaches in solving students' problems	Linking solutions to Islamic moral teachings	Interview, observation
Students' response to Guidance and Counseling services	Behavioral changes aligned with Islamic character	Observation, documentation
Obstacles in implementing Islamic-based Guidance and Counseling services	Internal student factors, environment, or facilities	Interview, documentation

The data analysis process was conducted using the model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña in 2014, which includes three main steps: data reduction (sorting relevant data from observations, interviews, and documentation), data presentation (in the form of narratives, tables, or matrices), and conclusion/verification (concluding findings based on patterns, themes, and correlations between data).

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from guidance and counseling teachers, students, and school documents. Technique triangulation

was carried out by combining interviews, observations, and documentation. Time triangulation was carried out by repeating data collection at different times to ensure consistency of information.

With this method, it is hoped that the research results will provide a complete picture of how counseling services can be an effective instrument in strengthening the Islamic character of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Muhammadiyah Surantih, while also revealing the challenges faced and strategies that can be optimized.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted over a period of four months, from February to May 2025. The focus of the research was to reveal how Islamic values-based counseling services are implemented in the process of strengthening student character. Data was obtained through participatory observation in the Guidance and Counseling room, classrooms, in-depth interviews with Guidance and Counseling teachers, the principal, Islamic Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and students, as well as a review of school program documents.

Guidance and Counseling Teachers at madrasahs manage counseling services in a structured manner, referring to four main types of services: individual counseling, group counseling, classical guidance, and guided group guidance. All of these services are designed by integrating the principles of Islamic counseling guidance, which refer to the values of *shidq* (honesty), *amanah* (responsibility), *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation), *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), and Islamic manners in speech and behavior.

The annual and semester programs for Guidance and Counseling teachers include specific topics such as "Honesty in Islam," "Discipline as Part of Faith," and "Building *Ukhuwah* through Mutual Assistance." All of this material is linked to relevant verses from the Quran and hadith, and in its implementation often uses a discussion approach, simulations, and daily worship assignments.

Implementation of Islamic Character Values in Guidance and Counseling Services

Based on 24 observation sessions, the implementation of Islamic character values appears to be consistent across all types of Guidance and Counseling services. The values that appeared most frequently were honesty, discipline, and politeness. Guidance and Counseling teachers actively reprimanded students who were late for class or did not do their homework, but this was done with a persuasive approach while reminding them of Islamic teachings about the importance of trustworthiness.

Table 2. Frequency of Islamic Character Values in Guidance and Counseling Services

Islamic Character Value	Frequency of Occurrence (out of 24 sessions)	Percentage (%)
Honesty (<i>shidq</i>)	21	87,5
Responsibility (<i>amanah</i>)	20	83,3
Discipline (<i>intizām</i>)	19	79,2
Courtesy (<i>adab</i>)	18	75,0
Brotherhood (<i>ukhuwah</i>)	16	66,7

The data in table 2 shows that honesty is the most dominant value conveyed, both through classical guidance and individual counseling sessions. The results of the table above also show that Islamic counseling services in madrasas have integrated the values of *sidiq*, *amanah*, and mutual assistance into daily practice. These findings are in line with Fitriani, (2020) research, which found that the application of Islamic counseling in madrasah can strengthen students' religious and social character. However, the difference that is more emphasized in the individual religious aspect, this study adds the dimension of collaboration between Guidance and Counseling teachers with Islamic Education teachers and homeroom teachers, so that character building is more collective in nature.

Changes in student behavior were measured using an Islamic character assessment scale completed by guidance counselors and homeroom teachers before and after the three-month counseling intervention. This scale contained 20 indicators of Islamic behavior, covering aspects of worship, personal character, social character, and discipline.

Table 3. Changes in Students' Average Islamic Character Scores

Islamic Character Aspect	Initial Score (0–100)	Final Score (0–100)	Improvement (%)
Honesty	72,1	85,3	+18,3
Responsibility	68,7	83,5	+21,5
Discipline	65,4	80,8	+23,6
Courtesy	70,2	84,1	+19,8
<i>Ukhuwah</i>	66,9	80,5	+20,4

The results show a consistent improvement in all aspects of Islamic character. The highest improvement occurred in the aspect of discipline (23.6%), which was previously a dominant problem in madrasas. In addition, the results of this study also reinforce the results of Zaini, (2021) study, which emphasizes the importance of internalizing Islamic values through group counseling strategies. However, this study provides a new contribution in the form of a more contextual implementation model, namely through synergy between the Guidance and Counseling program and the school program, with madrasahs collaborating with Islamic Education teachers and homeroom teachers. Thus, this study not only offers a theoretical framework that the success of character-based Islamic counseling is not enough to be done in the counseling room alone, but must be integrated into the madrasah education ecosystem through Islamic Education teachers and Guardians.

First is the value of honesty. Before the implementation of Islamic-based Guidance and Counseling services, Guidance and Counseling teachers noted that there were still some students who dared to forge their parents' signatures in the permission book. After the program was implemented, cases like this decreased dramatically. One student admitted that he began to realize that lying is a grave sin after the guidance and counseling teacher read a hadith from Bukhari about the prohibition of lying.

The second is the value of responsibility. Guidance counselors and homeroom teachers mentioned a significant improvement in students' habit of completing assignments on time. In interviews, informants stated that “*after group guidance on trustworthiness, students became more punctual, and they even reminded each other to submit assignments on time*” (informant 1)

Third is the value of discipline. Habit-forming programs such as

congregational *dhuba* prayers and morning recitation before classes begin have proven effective in instilling discipline. Observations show that 85% of students arrive at school before 7:15 a.m., up from 60% at the beginning of the semester.

Fourth is politeness. Guidance and Counseling teachers emphasize the use of proper language when speaking to teachers and peers. Some students who previously often used harsh language have started to use greetings and expressions of gratitude.

The fifth is the value of *ukhuwah*. The outing to the nearest beach, designed as part of group counseling, enhanced the sense of togetherness among students. Guidance and Counseling teachers noted that students mingled more easily across classes after this activity.

Supporting and Hindering Factors in Strengthening Islamic Character through Counseling Services in Madrasah

The data collection results show that there are several factors that influence the effectiveness of Islamic Counseling services. Supporting factors include: the commitment of the Counseling teacher and the full support of the madrasah principal. The existence of a worship habit program that is integrated with the school schedule. A conducive madrasah environment with a religious atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the obstacles identified include: Exposure to social media that promotes values contrary to Islamic teachings. Limited face-to-face time for individual counseling due to busy class schedules. Some students require a special approach due to unsupportive family backgrounds.

The results of the study show that counseling services (integrated with Islamic values in madrasa) have a significant impact on strengthening student character, especially in terms of discipline, responsibility, and honesty. Consistent increases in scores across all Islamic character indicators confirm that this approach is capable of bringing about real change in student behavior. For example, the 23.6% increase in discipline is not only reflected in more punctual attendance but also in regular participation in routine worship activities. A homeroom teacher stated, "*In the past, at 7:20 a.m., there were still students entering the gate, but now at 7:10 a.m., almost all of them are in class, and some are even ready for tadarus*" (informant 2).

The habit of worship such as congregational *dhuba* prayers, morning recitation of the Quran, and *zikir* after Zuhur prayers are used by Guidance Counseling teachers not only as spiritual routines, but also as a means of internalizing moral values. Guidance Counseling teachers associate disciplined behavior, honesty, and responsibility with the arguments of the Quran and hadith, so that students understand the religious reasons behind these behavioral demands. In an interview session, a guidance counselor revealed, "*I always start with a verse or hadith, so that they realize that this is not just a school rule, but part of obedience to Allah. If it's only because they are afraid of being scolded by the teacher, it won't last long*" (informant 3). This approach makes behavioral change intrinsic, in line with the findings of (Hidayat & Suryana, 2022), which emphasize the importance of a religious value framework in Guidance Counseling services.

The exemplary behavior of guidance counselors is an equally important factor. Field observations show that the way guidance counselors greet students, listen patiently to their complaints, and use polite language serves as a real-life model that students follow. One informant said, "*When Ms. Yuni speaks, her tone is very calm. So when I get angry with my friends, I remember how Ms. Yuni speaks, and then I try to follow her example*" (informant 4). This phenomenon supports (Bandura, 2005)

social learning theory, which explains that behavior is more easily adopted when it is seen directly from a respected figure.

The success of this program is also supported by the synergy between educators and the school environment. The Islamic values conveyed by the Guidance Counseling teachers are reinforced by the Islamic Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and the principal. One of the Islamic Education teachers said, *"We coordinate with each other, so I continue the guidance theme in religion class. If this week's guidance is about trustworthiness, in my class I discuss stories of trustworthy companions"* (informant 5). The consistency of this message reduces the risk of moral dissonance that often arises in adolescents when they receive different guidance from different authority figures (Santrock, 2021).

However, the study also found obstacles that cannot be ignored. Exposure to social media poses a real challenge. Guidance counselors admitted, *"Some students complain that in WhatsApp or TikTok groups, their friends like to send videos that contradict Islamic values. This affects the way they talk and think"* (informant 6). In addition, limited time for individual counseling means that some cases cannot be dealt with in depth. In an interview, one student revealed, *"Sometimes I want to talk at length, but Ms. Yuni says that time is up because she has another class. So my story is not finished"* (informant 7). This reinforces Haryono, (2021) recommendation that guidance counseling services in madrasas be given more time to handle special cases.

From the perspective of Kohlberg's moral development theory in 1981, the Islamic Counseling Guidance program in madrasahs helps some students move from fear-based morality to value-based morality. This is reflected in consistent behavioral changes without direct supervision, as expressed by one student: *"Now, if I find money in the cafeteria, I immediately return it to the cafeteria teacher. Because I remember what Ms. Yuni said, that it is a trust and Allah knows what we do"* (informant 8).

These findings lead to the conclusion that strengthening Islamic character through counseling services requires a combination of strategies involving habit formation, instilling values, role modeling, and collaboration among educators. The challenges of the digital age must be anticipated through Islamic digital literacy and cooperation with families, so that the values instilled in school can be maintained in the home and community. With a consistent and adaptive approach, the Islamic Guidance Counseling model implemented in madrasahs has the potential to become a good practice example for other madrasahs in shaping students' moral and spiritual character.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education has been proven effective in strengthening students' character, particularly in terms of discipline, responsibility, and honesty. This character-building process takes place through a combination of strategies, including the habit of worship, instilling values based on the Quran and hadith, the exemplary behavior of guidance counselors, and close collaboration among educators. This study reinforces the theory that character building can be optimized through a collaboration of strategies of habitualizing worship, teacher role modeling, and synergy of teacher role modeling. Madrasahs need to make the integration of Islamic values in Guidance Counseling services a systematic strategy for creating a religious and character-building educational environment. This study is still contextual to one madrasah, so generalization of the results requires caution. It is hoped that future research will be more extensive, involving different

madrasahs and examining other character indicators to enrich literacy and understanding.

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Author contribution

Neni Sriwahyuni: data curation, **Maria Oktasari:** writing-original draft preparation, **Fauzi Akmal:** conceptualization, **Khadijah & Hari Suriadi:** methodology, visualization, editing, analysis.

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