

Analysis of the implementation of psychological foundations in strengthening character in elementary school students

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the importance of strengthening students' character through psychological approaches within a boarding school environment. The aim of this study is to analyze the implementation of psychological foundations in strengthening students' character at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School, West Pasaman Regency. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings indicate that character strengthening is implemented through the integration of academic and dormitory activities over a 24-hour period, including congregational prayers, Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), discipline, and structured social interactions. Educational psychology approaches, particularly behaviorism, social learning, and humanistic perspectives, play a significant role in shaping students' religious, disciplined, and responsible character through habituation, modeling, and reinforcement. However, the implementation faces several challenges, including student fatigue, social conflicts, and the influence of the digital era. This study implies the need for a more holistic approach by integrating meaningful habituation, role modeling, emotional support, and digital literacy within Islamic education to foster students' internal awareness in practicing Islamic values.

Keywords: *psychological approaches; boarding school; character; Islamic education.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya penguatan karakter siswa melalui pendekatan psikologis dalam lingkungan pendidikan berbasis boarding school. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi landasan psikologis dalam penguatan karakter siswa di SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School Kabupaten Pasaman Barat. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, serta dianalisis menggunakan teknik reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penguatan karakter siswa dilakukan melalui integrasi kegiatan pembelajaran dan kehidupan asrama selama 24 jam, yang diwujudkan melalui pembiasaan ibadah berjamaah, tahfidz Al-Qur'an, kedisiplinan, serta interaksi sosial yang terarah. Pendekatan psikologi

pendidikan, khususnya behavioristik, sosial, dan humanistik, berperan dalam membentuk karakter religius, disiplin, dan tanggung jawab melalui mekanisme pembiasaan, keteladanan, dan penguatan. Namun demikian, implementasi tersebut masih menghadapi tantangan berupa kejenuhan siswa, konflik sosial, serta pengaruh perkembangan era digital. Penelitian ini berimplikasi pada pentingnya penguatan pendekatan yang lebih holistik melalui integrasi pembiasaan yang bermakna, keteladanan, pendampingan emosional, dan literasi digital dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam.

Kata kunci: penguatan karakter; pendekatan psikologis; boarding school; Pendidikan Agama Islam.

Introduction

Education is essentially a process of knowledge transformation that is directed at the development, strengthening, and perfecting of all human potentials as a whole. However, the current empirical conditions show that there is a serious challenge in the form of a deterioration of moral and ethical values (character degradation) among students (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2019; Nadyanda A & Muthi, 2025). This phenomenon is reflected in various deviant behaviors that are often found in the school environment, such as lack of respect for teachers, bullying, fights between students, and the use of rude language (Ode Bau, Halidu, Isnanto, Abdullah, & Cuga, 2025).

On the other hand, the rapid development of digital technology also affects the pattern of students' social interactions. High dependence on digital devices tends to reduce the intensity of direct interpersonal communication, which has an impact on declining empathy and social skills. Furthermore, the practice of strengthening character in schools often does not run optimally. This can be seen from the tendency of students who only display positive behavior when under the supervision of teachers, but have not been able to internalize these values as consistent self-awareness (Gunawan, 2024; Harahap & Suyadi, 2020).

In this context, the study of educational psychology is very urgent, especially in the learning of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is known in Indonesia as *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (PAI) and related subjects. The psychological foundation has a strategic role because it provides a comprehensive understanding of how students think, feel, and behave according to their developmental stages. This understanding is an important basis in designing a learning process that is not only cognitively effective, but also touches on the affective and behavioral dimensions (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2019).

In PAI subjects such as *Aqidah Akhlak*, *Fiqih*, *Al-Qur'an Hadith*, and History of Islamic Civilization (SPI), a psychological approach is needed so that religious values do not stop at the level of knowledge alone (knowing the good), but are able to be appreciated (feeling the good) and manifested in real actions (acting the good). Thus, PAI learning not only produces students who understand the teachings of Islam, but also is able to internalize it in daily life (Wulandari, Istihsan, Khairunnisa, Tegar, & Abdurrahmansyah, 2025). On the other hand, without being supported by an understanding of educational psychology, the PAI learning process has the potential to become normative and tends to be indoctrinative, so it does not pay attention to the readiness and learning characteristics of students. This condition can result in learning to be less meaningful and unable to form students' internal awareness. Therefore, in learning *Aqidah Akhlak*, for example, the learning psychology approach assists teachers in designing the right habituation strategy, so that noble moral values can develop into spontaneous behaviors inherent in students. Similarly, in learning *Al-Qur'an Hadith*, the psychological approach plays an important role in adapting the material to the cognitive and emotional capacity of students, especially at the elementary school level. This adjustment allows for the creation of a pleasant learning atmosphere, encourages students' intrinsic motivation, and increases their active involvement in the learning process (Wulandari et al., 2025).

In the context of strengthening character through psychological approaches, a number of previous studies have shown that the role of educational psychology is very significant in shaping students' behavior and personality. One of the relevant studies was conducted by Arsyadul Kirom, Muhammad Hilmi Mahfuzh, and Ma'mun Hanif (2025) in a study entitled *The Role of Educational Psychology in Shaping Students' Character in Elementary School*. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation of teachers and students in elementary schools. The results of the study show that teachers' understanding of educational psychology has a crucial role in creating a conducive learning atmosphere, encouraging moral development, and helping students recognize their potential and manage emotions better (Kirom et al., 2025).

These findings are strengthened by the research of Hazizah Isnaini and Robie Fanreza (2024) who show that effective character education requires the integration of moral knowledge, affective experiences, and behavioral practices in students' daily lives (Isnaini & Fanreza, 2024). A study in the MDPI journal confirms that strengthening values through contextual and repetitive learning experiences increases the internalization of character and student involvement in prosocial behavior (Chao-Fernández, Chao-Fernández, & López-Chao, 2020). In

addition, research in the journal *Frontiers Media* shows that non-cognitive factors such as grit and self-regulation have a significant contribution to learning resilience and discipline character formation in elementary school students (Krawitz & Schukajlow, 2020).

Furthermore, the results of Dewi Ruhmandari et al. revealed that an emotionally supportive learning environment, coupled with teachers' habituation and example, has a positive effect on the development of students' empathy, responsibility, and social skills (Dewi Rukmandari, Mariyana, & Listiana, 2025). These findings suggest that character formation cannot be separated from intense and consistent social interaction in an educational environment. Furthermore, these studies confirm that character formation such as discipline, responsibility, and empathy is not only done through the delivery of material, but also through example and habituation in a conducive learning environment. In other words, students' character develops optimally when the values taught are internalized through real experiences in daily social interactions. These findings reinforce the view that effective character education must integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects simultaneously.

In line with previous findings, this study has strong relevance in examining the implementation of psychological foundations in strengthening students' character. However, there is a gap in previous research that generally still focuses on the context of regular elementary schools with limited interaction durations, so that the process of character formation is more studied in the framework of formal learning in the classroom. Previous research also tends to place educational psychology as a conceptual approach, without examining in depth how these principles are implemented systematically in an educational environment that lasts all the time.

In contrast, this study offers novelty by placing the boarding school environment as the main context of the study, which has a unique characteristic in the form of a 24-hour coaching system. In this context, the process of character formation does not only occur in formal learning activities, but also through social interaction, habituation, and supervision that takes place continuously in the dormitory environment. Another novelty lies in the integration between the foundations of educational psychology and the real practice of Islamic religious education in forming students' character holistically, which includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions simultaneously.

In addition, this study also makes a new contribution by empirically examining how the mechanisms of habituation, exemplary, and behavior reinforcement work in the boarding life system, as well as how these factors interact with the psychological development of elementary school-age students.

Thus, this study not only expands the theoretical study of educational psychology, but also offers an implemented model based on boarding school that has the potential to be an alternative in strengthening students' character in the contemporary era.

Based on the background that has been described, this research is focused on several main problems, namely how to implement the educational psychology approach in strengthening student character at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School West Pasaman Regency, how the role of habituation methods and teacher examples in shaping the disciplinary and religious character of students in the boarding school environment, and what are the challenges faced in applying psychological foundations for strengthening students' character in today's digital era.

In line with the formulation of the problem, this study aims to analyze the application of the principles of educational psychology as the main foundation in the character formation process at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School, describe the contribution of habituation programs and teacher behavior modeling to improve the quality of student character, and identify various obstacles and innovative solutions in integrating character values through a psychological approach in the school environment.

Research Method

Research data was obtained through observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Observation was carried out to directly observe students' daily activities in the dormitory, such as worship activities, discipline habituation, and social interaction. Interviews were conducted in depth with teachers and dormitory coaches to explore information related to character development strategies, the role of mentoring, and the obstacles faced. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complete data in the form of activity schedules, flagship programs, and relevant school policies.

The data analysis process is carried out descriptively by referring to an interactive analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The data obtained is selected and focused on aspects relevant to the research objective, then presented in the form of a systematic narrative to facilitate interpretation. Furthermore, conclusion drawing is carried out by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings of the analyzed data. The validity of the data is maintained through the triangulation technique of sources and methods, namely by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure data consistency. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of

psychological foundations in strengthening the character of students at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School.

Results and Discussion

A. Research findings

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School, West Pasaman Regency, it was found that strengthening student character was carried out through a 24-hour dormitory-based coaching system structured in daily activities. To facilitate understanding, a summary of students' daily activities is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Patterns of Daily Activities of Students in the Dormitory (Safitri, 2026).

Time	Activities
04.00-04.30	Wake up, get ready, and wait for <i>Subuh</i>
04.30-06.15	<i>Subuh</i> prayer in congregation and tahfidz Al-Qur'an
06.15-07.00	Pickets, Breakfast, Dhuha Prayer, and Morning Apples in the Dormitory
07.00-14.30	Learning activities at school
14.30-15.30	Rest
15.30-17.15	Asr prayer, pickets, featured programs
17.15-18.15	Free time (playing), afternoon bath and prayer preparation
18.00-21.00	Maghrib prayer, eating, Isha, and tahfidz
21.00	Naight Rest

In addition, it was found that character strengthening is carried out through various habituation programs, such as five-time congregational prayers, *dhuha* prayers, *tahfidz* Al-Qur'an, sunnah fasting, and daily picket activities. Featured programs also vary based on the day, such as *Aqidah Akhlak*, *Fiqh Ibadah*, *silat*, *annisa'* forums, and *tahsin* and *syarhil* Qur'an activities. The results of the interviews showed that the reward and punishment system was applied as a form of behavior reinforcement, where students who excelled in memorization or discipline were rewarded, while violations were acted upon through educational sanctions such as cleaning tasks or further coaching. In addition, it was found that there were social dynamics such as conflicts between students which in some cases led to bullying behavior, even though they had been handled by the dormitory coach.

In general, the findings of the study show that the boarding school environment provides a very conducive space for the formation of intensive and structured habituation patterns in strengthening students' character. This is due to the existence of an integrated life system for 24 hours, where academic, religious, and social activities take place in a mutually supportive unit. This pattern allows for consistent repetition of behavior, so that values such as

discipline, responsibility, and religiosity are not only taught conceptually, but also practiced directly in daily life. In addition, the existence of dormitory coaches who accompany students on an ongoing basis also strengthens the process of social control and internalization of values through exemplary and supervision mechanisms. Thus, the boarding school environment not only functions as a place of learning, but also as an ecosystem of character formation that allows the transformation of values from the stage of introduction to habituation, until finally becoming part of the student's personality.

B. Analysis of the implementation of psychological foundations at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School

The implementation of psychological foundations in strengthening the character of students at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School in West Pasaman Regency can be analyzed comprehensively through the integration of the dormitory life system, habituation programs, and mentoring patterns that take place on a sustainable basis. As a boarding school-based educational institution, SD El-Ma'arif has an advantage in terms of high intensity of interaction between students and the educational environment, especially through the role of dormitory coaches who accompany students for 24 hours.

Based on field data, the pattern of students' daily activities shows a systematic and repetitive coaching structure, starting from waking up before dawn to returning to rest at night. Activities such as congregational prayers, *tahfidz* Al-Qur'an, hygiene pickets, morning apples, and excellent programs scheduled every day reflect the application of strong habituation principles (Safitri, 2026). In the perspective of behavioristic psychology, this structured routine serves as a consistent stimulus in shaping student behavior (Ridha Fitriani J. Ode Bau et al., 2025). Reinforcement through reward systems such as rewards for the best memorizers and exemplary students also strengthens students' tendency to repeat positive behaviors, so that permanent habits are formed (Upriani, 2023).

Furthermore, the implementation of intense religious activities, such as mandatory congregational prayers, *dhuha* prayers, *tahfidz*, and sunnah fasting, shows the integration between character development and spiritual values (Ridha Fitriani J. Ode Bau et al., 2025). This is in line with the value internalization approach that does not only stop at the cognitive aspect, but also touches on the affective and behavioral dimensions (Zahra Nadyanda A & Ibnu Muthi, 2025). In this framework, the process of knowing the good, doing the good, and being the good seems to be systematically pursued through students' daily activities.

From the point of view of developmental psychology, the structure of disciplined activities in the boarding school environment has great potential in

shaping the character of elementary school-age students, especially in the aspects of discipline, responsibility, and independence. This is in line with Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development which states that children at the school age stage are in the industry vs. inferiority phase, where they begin to develop a sense of responsibility, skills, and confidence through structured and meaningful activities (Argasiam, 2024). Activities such as cleaning beds, cleaning pickets, and independent time management in the context of this study show that there are coaching efforts that are relevant to the needs of these developments, because they provide space for students to learn independently and be responsible for their tasks.

In addition, these findings can also be attributed to Jean Piaget's view that primary school-age children are at a concrete operational stage, where they learn through direct experience and real activities (Thahir, 2022). In addition, these findings can also be attributed to Jean Piaget's view that primary school-age children are at a concrete operational stage, where they learn through direct experience and real activities. However, the high intensity of activities also needs to be observed from the perspective of children's emotional development. According to the humanistic approach developed by Abraham Maslow, the need for a sense of security, comfort, and emotional balance are important prerequisites in the process of individual development. If the structure of the dense activity is not balanced with rest, recreation, and a flexible approach, then it has the potential to cause saturation and emotional exhaustion in students (Sartika, Hartono, & Yarni, 2025). In the context of this study, it shows that even though the coaching system has run in a structured manner, adjustments are still needed that take into account the psychological condition of students so that the character strengthening process takes place optimally and sustainably.

From the perspective of social psychology, dorm life that places students in continuous group interaction is an important means of building social skills. Shared activities such as studying, worship, and excellent programs allow students to learn to work together, respect each other, and build solidarity. However, data show that there are still cases of conflict among students (Safitri, 2026). This indicates that intense social interaction does not always produce a positive impact, but also requires proper management so that it does not develop into negative behaviors (Gunawan, 2024).

The existence of a dormitory coach who accompanies students for 24 hours is a key factor in controlling these dynamics. This role is very important in providing emotional assistance, resolving conflicts, and ensuring that the dormitory environment remains conducive. Meanwhile, teachers play a more role in the academic context during school hours. This division of roles shows the

existence of a comprehensive mentoring system, although it still requires good coordination between teachers and coaches so that character development runs in an integrated manner.

On the other hand, the application of the reward and punishment system is also part of a psychological strategy in shaping student behavior. Giving awards for outstanding and exemplary students shows positive reinforcement efforts, while giving sanctions in the form of cleaning tasks, summoning parents, or the form of fines reflects a corrective disciplinary approach (Safitri, 2026). From the perspective of educational psychology, this system is effective when applied proportionately, consistently, and educationally, so that it does not cause psychological pressure, but instead builds students' awareness and responsibility (Upriani, 2023).

Overall, the implementation of the psychological foundation at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School has gone quite well through a structured habituation system, integration of religious values, and intensive mentoring in the dormitory environment. However, several challenges still need to be considered, such as the potential for student boredom due to dense activities, as well as the emergence of social conflicts such as bullying. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen a more humane psychological approach, improve the quality of social interactions, and optimize the role of coaches in creating a safe, comfortable environment, and supporting the development of students' character holistically.

C. Synergy of psychology theory and PAI practice in the boarding environment

The synergy between the theory of educational psychology and the practice of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School is evident in the coaching system that is integrated between academic, religious, and dormitory life activities. Based on field data, daily activities such as congregational prayers, tahfidz Al-Qur'an, cleanliness pickets, and time discipline are concrete forms of the implementation of character values that are not only taught, but also practiced continuously in the lives of students (Wahab & Rosnawati, 2021; Wulandari et al., 2025).

From the perspective of behavioristic theory, the practice reflects the application of the principle of reinforcement through systematic habituation. Activities such as praying on time, independence in making beds, and involvement in daily programs serve as a consistently repeated stimulus. Positive reinforcement is provided through a reward system, such as rewards for students with the best memorization or exemplary student categories, which psychologically encourage students to maintain positive behaviors. In contrast,

punishments that are educational in nature, such as cleaning tasks or advanced coaching, serve as behavioral control. In psychological studies, consistent reinforcement has been shown to be effective in forming long-term habits and behaviors in students (Schunk, 2012; Wulandari et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the practice of habituation at SD El-Ma'arif is in line with the concept of internalizing values in Islamic education which emphasizes the stages of knowing the good, doing the good, and being the good. In this context, students not only understand the importance of religious values, but also practice them repeatedly until they become part of their personality. Routine activities such as tahfidz Al-Qur'an after dawn and night, as well as the implementation of sunnah worship such as Thursday fasting, show that the process of internalizing values takes place simultaneously between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Sidi, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of the behavioristic approach in the boarding school environment needs to be balanced with a humanistic approach so as not to cause psychological pressure on students. Considering that elementary school students are at a developmental stage that still needs a sense of security and emotional support, the coaching atmosphere must be supportive, not repressive. In this case, the existence of a dormitory coach who accompanies students for 24 hours is very important in creating warm and empathetic interpersonal relationships.

The humanistic approach at SD El-Ma'arif can be seen from efforts to create an environment that allows students to still feel valued and accepted, even though they are far from their parents. Activities such as morning counseling, informal interaction with the coach, and the provision of a play space in the afternoon are a form of balance between discipline and the psychological needs of children. This is in line with the view that a safe and supportive learning environment will encourage more authentic and sustainable character development (Slavin, 2014).

Furthermore, the integration between behavioristic and humanistic approaches shows that character formation at SD El-Ma'arif does not only rely on behavioral control, but also on the internal awareness of students. In other words, the ultimate goal of this process is not just obedience to rules, but the formation of character born from self-awareness. This is the essence of character education from an Islamic perspective, namely the formation of morals that are spontaneous and inherent in individuals.

Thus, the synergy between psychological theory and PAI practice in boarding school environments such as El-Ma'arif Elementary School can be said to be quite effective in comprehensively shaping students' character. Nevertheless, a

sustainable balance is needed between a habituation-based discipline approach and a humanistic approach that pays attention to the emotional needs of students, so that the coaching process is not only effective, but also sustainable and meaningful.

D. Case comparison: Learning from other schools for El-Ma'arif Elementary School

To strengthen the effectiveness of the implementation of psychological foundations in strengthening character, SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School can take lessons from good practices that have been implemented in several other elementary schools. This comparison is important as a form of reflection as well as strategy enrichment, so that character development is not only based on internal routines, but also supported by relevant empirical findings.

First, findings from SDN No. 67 Gorontalo show that habituation programs such as joint dhikr and memorization of short surahs make a significant contribution to strengthening students' character, with an influence of 38.8% (Ridha Fitriani J. Ode Bau et al., 2025). If it is associated with the conditions at El-Ma'arif Elementary School, the practice of habituation has actually been more intense through daily tahfidz activities, congregational prayers, and other worship programs. However, what needs to be considered is the internalization quality of these activities. This means that not only the frequency of activities is important, but also how students understand the meaning of the activity. Thus, El-Ma'arif Elementary School can optimize a reflective approach, such as giving meaning after worship activities, so that the habituation process is not mechanical, but transformative.

Second, the practice at SD Muhammadiyah Purbayan emphasizes the importance of stimulating and supervising teachers consistently, considering that psychologically elementary school students do not have full independence in controlling behavior (Harahap & Suyadi, 2020). This is in line with the conditions at El-Ma'arif Elementary School, where the dormitory coach has a dominant role in accompanying students for 24 hours. From the perspective of developmental psychology, this is a major strength, because students are still at the stage of needing external control before they are able to achieve self-regulation. However, the challenge that arises is how to gradually shift the external control into internal awareness. This means that coaching not only emphasizes compliance with the rules, but also fosters students' intrinsic understanding and motivation in carrying out these values.

Third, the results of research at SDN 2 Panarung show that spiritual intelligence (Spiritual Quotient/SQ) developed through a fun learning approach

is able to increase students' honesty by up to 78% (Pratama & Surawa, 2025). This finding has important implications for SD El-Ma'arif, that religious-based character development is not enough with a discipline and routine approach, but also needs to be packaged in a fun way and touches on the emotional aspects of students. In the context of boarding schools that have quite a tight schedule, an approach that is too rigid has the potential to cause boredom. Therefore, a variety of methods such as educational games, dialogical approaches, or creative activities based on Islamic values can be strategies to maintain a balance between discipline and psychological comfort of students.

Comparatively, the three studies show that the success of character strengthening is not only determined by the intensity of the program, but also by the quality of the psychological approach used, such as the consistency of supervision, the depth of internalization of grades, and a pleasant learning atmosphere. In the context of El-Ma'arif Elementary School, the advantages of the boarding system that allows for 24-hour coaching are great potential that other schools do not necessarily have. However, this potential needs to be optimized with a more reflective, humanistic, and adaptive approach to students' psychological needs. Thus, learning from other schools emphasizes that effective character strengthening must integrate three main aspects, namely consistent habituation, intensive mentoring, and a fun and meaningful approach. If these three aspects can be implemented in a balanced manner, then El-Ma'arif Elementary School has a great chance of becoming an ideal model in the development of boarding school-based character education at the elementary school level.

E. Psychology-based character strengthening strategies and Islamic guidance in El-Ma'arif

Based on theoretical analysis and field findings at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School, character strengthening strategies need to be designed integrative by combining educational psychology approaches and Islamic values. This is important so that character development is not only structural through rules, but also touches on aspects of students' internal awareness. First, the application of *tadzkirah* and *istiqomah* models is the main foundation in character development. In this context, the modeling of dormitory coaches has a very strategic position, considering the intensity of the interaction that lasts for 24 hours. Students not only learn from instruction, but also from the real behavior they observe every day. When coaches consistently show discipline, responsibility, and religiosity, students will naturally imitate and internalize these values. Meanwhile, the principle of *istiqomah* emphasizes consistency in carrying out these values. This is in line with previous findings that repetitive and consistent habituation is the

key to forming a stable character. On the other hand, placing students as active subjects, for example through responsibility in daily activities, will encourage the development of independence and a sense of belonging to the dormitory environment (Fitri, Arisanti, Indra, & Arnel, 2024).

Second, a sustainable habituation strategy needs to be maintained while optimizing its quality. Data shows that El-Ma'arif Elementary School already has a very strong routine system, ranging from congregational worship, tahfidz, to picket activities and excellent programs. From the perspective of behavioristic psychology, this pattern is very effective in shaping behavior through repetition. However, in order not to cause boredom, habituation needs to be packaged in a more varied and fun way. For example, picket activities can be combined with a teamwork system, or eating together can be used as a moment to strengthen the values of togetherness and manners. Thus, habituation not only results in obedience, but also a positive emotional experience (Zahra Nadyanda A & Ibnu Muthi, 2025).

Third, reinforcement through empathic counseling services is a need that cannot be ignored in a boarding school environment. Elementary school students who live far from their parents have the potential to experience psychological distress such as anxiety, longing, or difficulty adapting. In this context, the dormitory coach not only plays the role of a supervisor, but also as a surrogate parent who provides emotional support. A communicative, empathetic, and non-judgmental approach to counseling is essential to help students express their feelings. In addition, this service also serves as a preventive mechanism in reducing the potential for (Kiom et al., 2025).

Fourth, digital literacy strategies with character become relevant in facing the challenges of the modern era. Although life in dormitories tends to be more controlled, access to technology still has the potential to influence students' mindsets and behaviors. Therefore, assistance to the use of technology needs to be directed not only at restrictions, but also at fostering critical and ethical thinking skills. Students need to be equipped with the ability to filter information, understand the impact of digital content, and use technology wisely in accordance with Islamic values. Thus, character education is not only relevant in the context of dormitory life, but also in facing broader social realities (Gunawan, 2024).

Overall, the character-building strategy at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School shows that the success of coaching is not only determined by strict rules or the density of activities, but by a balance between a structural approach and a psychological approach. The integration of example, habituation, emotional mentoring, and characterful digital literacy is key in creating an educational

process that is not only effective, but also humane and sustainable. With this approach, students' character is not only formed as a result of external control, but develops into an internal awareness inherent in them.

F. Critical reflection

Character education cannot be reduced to just a process of moral knowledge transfer (knowing the good), but must include the affective dimension (feeling the good) until it reaches the stage of internalization that gives birth to spontaneous behavior (being the good). In this context, the success of character education is not only measured by students' understanding of values, but also by the extent to which these values are embedded and reflected in daily behavior.

In a boarding school environment such as El-Ma'arif Elementary School, the opportunity to comprehensively form character is very open through a 24-hour coaching system. The intensity of interaction and the structure of programmed activities allow for the formation of positive habits consistently. However, this condition also has the potential to give birth to a mechanical routine if it is not accompanied by a deep process of meaning. Religious activities that are carried out repeatedly without reflection risk losing their essence, so that they do not fully impact the formation of students' internal awareness. Furthermore, character building approaches that rely too much on external rules and control have the potential to result in pseudo-compliance. Students may exhibit disciplined behavior while under supervision, but do not necessarily maintain it outside the dormitory environment. This shows that the process of internalizing values has not been optimal, because the motivation formed is still external, not intrinsic.

On the other hand, the development of the digital era presents new challenges in character education. Student character formation is no longer only influenced by direct interaction in the school environment, but also by virtual interactions that are often beyond the reach of educators' supervision. The limitations of digital literacy among teachers can cause the character mentoring process to become less relevant to the realities faced by students, such as the phenomenon of cyberbullying, exposure to negative content, and digital identity crises. This condition shows that strengthening character requires a more comprehensive and adaptive approach. One of the efforts that can be made is to integrate spiritual intelligence with a positive psychological approach, where every worship activity is not only carried out as a routine, but also accompanied by reflection on meaning. Thus, students not only do good, but also understand and feel the value contained in it.

In addition, character learning approaches need to be developed in a differentiated manner by paying attention to the uniqueness of each student's psychological development. A uniform approach has the potential to ignore individual needs, making it less effective in the process of internalizing values. Therefore, the role of teachers and coaches is very important in providing more personalized and humane assistance. The integration of digital literacy in PAI learning is also a strategic step to answer the challenges of the times. Digital ethical issues can be used as part of learning, so that students are able to build character not only in real life, but also in the digital space. In addition, strengthening exemplary through the *tadzkirah* model needs to be carried out consistently, because the behavior of teachers and coaches is the main source of learning for students. Finally, character strengthening will be more optimal if supported by an experiential learning approach, where students are involved in real experiences through social activities outside the dormitory environment. This hands-on experience allows students to internalize values more deeply, so that the characters formed are not only conceptual, but also contextual and applicative in daily life.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that the implementation of psychological foundations in strengthening student character at SD El-Ma'arif Boarding School, West Pasaman Regency takes place effectively through a 24-hour dormitory-based integrated coaching system, which allows for the formation of habits of discipline, religious, responsibility, and independence consistently. The application of the principles of educational psychology through habituation, example, and behavior strengthening, supported by the active role of teachers and dormitory coaches, has been proven to contribute to shaping students' character not only in cognitive aspects, but also affective and behavioral aspects. However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the balance between external control and internal awareness of students, so that habituation does not stop at mechanical routines, but develops into values that are lived. In addition, challenges such as saturation, social dynamics, and the influence of the digital era demand an adaptive and contextual approach. Therefore, the strengthening of boarding school-based character will be more optimal if it is carried out through synergy between a systematic activity structure, consistent examples, and psychological assistance that pays attention to the development needs of students, so as to be able to produce sustainable and meaningful character formation in the context of Islamic Religious Education.

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