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Efforts of the Principal of MI in Facing the Challenges of Globalization through Character Strengthening

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the challenges of globalization that require Islamic educational institutions to be able to equip students with strong and competitive characters. The purpose of this study is to examine in depth the efforts of the principal of MI Cerdas Nurani in facing these challenges. The research used a qualitative approach with a case study method conducted at MI Cerdas Nurani, Cimahi City. Data collection techniques included interviews, group discussions, and observations, while data analysis was conducted descriptively and narratively. The research findings indicate that the principal's main strategy in facing globalization is maintaining the sustainability of the Habit Character Life Skill (HCL) Curriculum. This curriculum focuses on strengthening the character of religious, independent, and competitive students through the habituation of the values of cleanliness, neatness, and discipline, as well as the practice of daily worship and applicable monthly habits. Implementation is carried out through stages of habit campaigns and habit celebrations by involving the active role of parents and the role models of the principal and teachers. The HCL Curriculum is a strategic innovation of the principal of MI Cerdas Nurani in fortifying students from the negative impacts of globalization while preparing them to compete globally.

Keywords

Character Strengthening, Globalization, Habit Character Life Skill, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Principal Leadership.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, modernization is an unavoidable phenomenon resulting from the rapid development of science and technology (Omonov, 2022; Sunaiah et al., 2024). This process is integrated into a broader wave known as globalization, which has transformed nearly all aspects of human life, including social, cultural, economic, and educational spheres. Numerous international studies indicate that globalization offers significant opportunities, such as easier access to information, learning innovation, and enhanced global competitiveness. However, it also presents serious challenges, including value crises, moral erosion, and cultural homogenization, particularly among younger generations (Giddens, 2020; Ritzer, 2021; OECD, 2023). With unlimited access to information, children have become one of the most vulnerable groups to the negative impacts of globalization, such as character degradation, consumptive behavior, and the weakening of cultural and religious identity (Hasibuan et al., 2024; Purba, 2025).

In the educational context, globalization challenges not only demand the development of cognitive competence and 21st-century skills, but also require the strengthening of character, morality, and spiritual values as the foundation for holistic human resource development. UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that education systems in the global era must balance global competencies with local values to ensure that students do not lose their identity amid rapid global change. Therefore, basic education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character from an early age as a safeguard against the negative impacts of globalization.

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), as a formal basic education institution under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, has distinctive characteristics compared to general elementary schools. In addition to providing general education, MI emphasizes Islamic religious education through subjects such as the Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak (Islamic creed and character), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Arabic language, and Islamic cultural history (Fadillah & Rahim, 2021; Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023; Ramadhan et al., 2025). This in-depth religious instruction aims to enable students not only to understand Islamic teachings conceptually, but also to internalize and apply them in daily life as moral and spiritual guidance. Religious knowledge is therefore expected to function as a value-based defense in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of globalization (Sirojudin, 2019; Moorthy et al., 2021; Amin, 2024).

Nevertheless, the presence of religious subjects and Islamic values in the curriculum does not automatically make MI students immune to the influences of globalization. Several studies indicate that madrasah students also experience behavioral changes and value shifts due to the penetration of global culture through digital media and information technology (Fikri et al., 2023). This condition suggests that globalization challenges are not solely related to the formal curriculum, but are also closely linked to leadership strategies, school culture, and character-building practices embedded in the daily life of the madrasah.

Most previous studies have primarily focused on the integration of character education into the curriculum, the role of teachers in value-based learning, or normative character education policies. However, limited attention has been given to examining the role of madrasah principals' leadership in responding to globalization challenges through sustainable and contextual character habituation-based curriculum innovations. Moreover, studies that explore the practical implementation of character strengthening in the daily lives of madrasah students particularly through school culture and parental involvement remain relatively scarce. This research gap highlights the need for more contextual and in-depth empirical studies on madrasah strategies in responding concretely to globalization challenges. Therefore, this study aims to examine the efforts of MI in addressing

globalization challenges through character strengthening and to analyze its implementation in daily life.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Globalization Challenges and Character Education in MI

Globalization has significantly reshaped the educational landscape by accelerating the flow of information, values, and cultural practices across national boundaries. In the context of basic education, globalization presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it enhances access to knowledge, learning resources, and global perspectives. On the other hand, it exposes students to value conflicts, moral degradation, and cultural homogenization (Ritzer, 2021; OECD, 2023). Hasibuan et al. (2024) and Prasetya et al. (2024) emphasize that children at the primary education level are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of globalization due to their developmental stage and extensive exposure to digital media.

In Islamic educational institutions such as MI, globalization challenges are closely related to the preservation of religious values and moral character. Although MI integrates Islamic religious education subjects more intensively than general elementary schools, this structural advantage does not automatically guarantee students' resilience against global cultural influences (Fikri et al., 2023). Research indicates that shifts in students' attitudes, behavior, and value orientation still occur, driven by foreign cultural content accessed through technology and social media.

Therefore, character education becomes a central strategy for madrasahs in responding to globalization. Character education in MI is expected not only to transmit moral knowledge but also to cultivate daily habits that reflect Islamic values, such as discipline, responsibility, and social ethics (Sirojudin, 2019; Zahira et al., 2024). Studies highlight that effective character strengthening requires systematic habituation, integration into school culture, and consistent reinforcement beyond classroom instruction. This perspective positions character education as a critical response mechanism for madrasahs in maintaining students' Islamic identity while preparing them to live in a globalized world.

2.2. Principal Leadership and Character Strengthening through School Culture

School leadership plays a decisive role in determining how educational institutions respond to globalization challenges. In the context of MI, the principal is not only an administrative leader but also a moral and cultural leader responsible for shaping the school's vision, values, and character education practices. Fadillah and Rahim (2021), Effendi and Sahertian (2022), and Yakob et al. (2025) suggest that principals who demonstrate strong instructional and transformational leadership are more successful in embedding character education into school culture.

Leadership-based character strengthening emphasizes the importance of role modeling, policy innovation, and the creation of a value-oriented school environment. Rather than relying solely on formal curriculum content, principals are encouraged to promote character education through daily routines, behavioral norms, and habitual practices that are consistently applied across the school community. Research highlights that habituation-based programs are more effective when supported by strong leadership commitment and consistency (Anisah, 2023; Sunaiah et al., 2024; Sanjani, 2024; Dewi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, effective principals actively involve teachers, parents, and students in character education initiatives. Parental collaboration is particularly important in reinforcing character values outside school, ensuring continuity between school culture and home environment. Studies also underline that character education initiatives are more sustainable when principals encourage collective responsibility and shared ownership among stakeholders (Fikri et al., 2023; Martinez & Partin,

2023; Amallia et al., 2025). Despite growing attention to character education, limited research has specifically examined principal-led character habituation programs in MI as a strategic response to globalization. This highlights the need for empirical studies that explore how principal leadership translates character education ideals into daily practices through school culture and habituation-based approaches.

3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study research design, which was selected to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of the efforts of the MI principal in responding to the challenges of globalization through character strengthening. The case study design enabled the researcher to explore the phenomenon comprehensively within its real-life setting, particularly in relation to leadership practices, school culture, and the implementation of character education programs. The research was conducted at MI Cerdas Nurani in 2025, which was purposively chosen due to its consistent implementation of the Habit Character Life Skill (HCL) program.

Data were collected using several techniques, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to gather detailed information regarding policies, strategies, and practices related to character strengthening in the madrasah. Observations were carried out to directly examine learning activities, daily character habituation practices, and interactions among members of the school community. Documentation involved the collection of written materials such as program guidelines, activity reports, official documents, and the madrasah profile. Focus group discussions were used to confirm and enrich data obtained from interviews and to support data triangulation.

The population of this study consisted of all members of MI Cerdas Nurani. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance and involvement in the HCL program. Key informants included the madrasah principal as the main decision-maker, the person in charge of the HCL program as the primary implementer, and several students as beneficiaries of the program. The number of informants was determined based on data adequacy and was concluded when data saturation was reached, indicated by the repetition of information and the absence of new significant findings.

To ensure data credibility, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different informants, while technique triangulation involved cross-checking data from interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and documentation. Data analysis employed descriptive and narrative analysis. The analytical process followed several stages, including data collection, data reduction through the selection and categorization of relevant information, data display in systematic narrative form, and the drawing of conclusions using both inductive and deductive reasoning. Conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure consistency, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings.

4. Results

4.1. Profile of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Cerdas Nurani

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Cerdas Nurani is a private Islamic elementary school located in Cimahi City, operating under the auspices of the At-Taqwa Educational Foundation. It was established with a clear vision to address parental needs for an educational institution that not only delivers academic instruction but also prioritizes the holistic and healthy development of children (Fadillah & Rahim, 2021). The madrasah positions itself as a partner for parents, working collaboratively to nurture a hopeful generation equipped with a strong foundational

character, reflecting the Islamic educational objective of integrating faith with daily life (Rahmadi & Hamdan, 2023).

The philosophical foundation of MI Cerdas Nurani is built upon the conviction that true education cultivates more than just intellectual capacity. It strives to be a manifestation of earnest effort and prayer to develop students who are emotionally intelligent and spiritually grounded. This approach aims to enable learners to navigate life's complexities with resilience, underpinned by faith and devotion to Allah SWT, thereby preparing them to contribute positively to society amidst global changes (Sirojudin, 2019; Amin, 2024).

In terms of curriculum, MI Cerdas Nurani implements a dual approach. It adheres to the national curriculum mandated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs while distinguishing itself through a distinctive character-strengthening program named the Habit Character Life Skill (HCL). This innovative program, initiated at the madrasah's founding in 2009, is designed to systematically instill positive habits until they become ingrained personal traits within each student (Yanuar, 2019). The program represents a proactive institutional strategy to embed core values into the very fabric of student conduct.

The HCL curriculum is explicitly centered on operationalizing three fundamental values upheld by MI Cerdas Nurani: cleanliness, orderliness, and discipline. These principles are not merely taught as abstract concepts but are translated into concrete, habitual actions across school and home environments. By focusing on this triad of values, the madrasah aims to build a robust moral framework that fosters self-management, personal responsibility, and social ethics, which are essential competencies for facing future challenges (Ghofur et al., 2024). Thus, the profile of MI Cerdas Nurani is defined by its commitment to complementary academic and character education within an Islamic framework.

4.2. Efforts of the Principal in Facing the Challenges of Globalization

In the context of Islamic education, the principal's role transcends administrative management to encompass moral and cultural leadership, which is pivotal in navigating institutional challenges (Japaruddin et al., 2020). Faced with the pervasive influences of globalization, which bring both opportunities for learning innovation and risks of value erosion, the principal of MI Cerdas Nurani adopts a proactive leadership strategy (Giddens, 2020; Ritzer, 2021). This strategy is fundamentally anchored in leveraging and sustaining the school's existing character education framework as a primary defensive and preparatory mechanism.

The principal's central effort involves the deliberate preservation and consistent implementation of the HCL Curriculum, established as the madrasah's flagship program since 2009. Recognizing that globalization necessitates a strong internal value system, the principal views the HCL curriculum not as an auxiliary activity but as the core strategic instrument to fortify students against negative cultural shifts (OECD, 2023). By ensuring the curriculum's continuity, the leadership provides a stable and predictable structure for character formation amid external uncertainties.

Beyond mere sustenance, the principal's leadership is characterized by a commitment to continuous quality improvement through systematic evaluation. According to interview findings, the principal conducts annual assessments of the HCL program to monitor its effectiveness, identify implementation gaps, and adapt strategies for optimal outcomes. This reflective practice aligns with instructional leadership principles that emphasize data-informed decision-making to enhance educational programs (Effendi & Sahertian, 2022; Sanjani, 2024). The evaluation process ensures the curriculum remains responsive and relevant to evolving global challenges.

Consequently, the principal's focused efforts on maintaining and refining the HCL Curriculum aim to produce graduates who possess resilient and internalized

character traits. These alumni are equipped not only with religious and moral integrity but also with the discipline and adaptability required to engage competitively in a globalized world (Wahyuni, Putra, & Lestari, 2023). Therefore, the principal's leadership in fortifying this character-building initiative is a direct and calculated response to globalization, transforming potential threats into opportunities for developing holistic, faith-grounded individuals.

4.3. Habit Character Life Skill Curriculum for Character Strengthening

The Habit Curriculum was developed by the founder of the At-Taqwa Foundation since the establishment of MI Cerdas Nurani and has become one of the madrasah's flagship programs in strengthening students' character (Yanuar, 2019). This curriculum was designed as a strategic response to the challenges of globalization in the era of Society 5.0 by positioning character education as the core foundation of learning. Grounded in the three core values of MI Cerdas Nurani cleanliness, orderliness, and discipline the curriculum aims to support parents in building children's character, equip students with strong moral foundations for future success, and develop a generation that is intellectually and spiritually competent, with strong faith and devotion to Allah SWT. The implementation of the HCL curriculum consists of daily religious practices and thematic monthly habits. Daily worship habits include the performance of the five obligatory prayers, voluntary fasting, tahajud prayer, Qur'an recitation and memorization review, charity, and daily good deeds practiced at home. These activities are intended to cultivate spiritual discipline and integrate religious values into students' everyday lives.

In addition to daily practices, the HCL curriculum applies ten thematic monthly habits implemented sequentially throughout the academic year. These themes include the cultivation of positive social attitudes through alertness, smiling, greeting, and respectful communication; personal cleanliness and neatness of school uniforms; discipline in lining up and queuing; maintaining the tidiness of classrooms and bedrooms; caring for and organizing clothes and footwear; practicing proper table manners; observing appropriate toilet etiquette; caring for plants and animals; fostering a love of reading and polite speech; and developing life skills through cooking and entrepreneurship. Each theme is implemented for one to one and a half months to ensure the habits are internalized as enduring character traits. The implementation of the HCL curriculum is closely supervised by the madrasah principal and a dedicated HCL team. This team was established to ensure consistent monitoring, sustainability, and clarity of program objectives. Annual evaluations are conducted to assess program effectiveness, ensure accountability to parents and the foundation, and identify areas for improvement so that the curriculum remains responsive to students' needs and contemporary challenges (Wahyuni et al., 2023).

Conceptually, the HCL curriculum emphasizes self-management as the core of character education. The ability to manage oneself is considered a key factor in personal success, as it fosters independence, responsibility, and self-leadership. Studies indicate that individual success is not determined solely by intellectual ability or technical skills, but also by self-management and interpersonal competence (Dwi Wahyuni et al., 2023). The process of habit internalization begins with a habit campaign conducted at the beginning of each month. Teachers introduce the theme, explain its benefits, and discuss the consequences of neglecting the habit. This stage is essential for building students' understanding and awareness so that the habits become deeply rooted character values. For upper-grade students, this process serves as character reinforcement, as they have been exposed to these habits consistently since the lower grades.

At the end of each month, a Habit Party is organized to appreciate students' participation and commitment in practicing the monthly habit both at school and at home. Parental involvement is an integral component of this process, particularly

through weekend habit implementation accompanied by guidance and evaluation sheets. This collaboration strengthens the partnership between the madrasah and families in supporting students' character development. Teachers also play a central role in the HCL curriculum by serving as role models. Through consistent practice of the same values promoted to students, teachers reinforce a positive school culture that supports character internalization across the entire madrasah community. The Habit Character Life Skill curriculum at MI Cerdas Nurani is thoughtfully designed to prepare students to face the challenges of globalization with a strong moral foundation. By placing character education at the center of the learning process, the curriculum aligns with the goals of Islamic education, which aim to produce a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also possesses noble character (*akhlaqul karimah*).

4.4. Strengthening Character in Facing the Challenges of Globalization

Globalization, defined as a process that interconnects individuals and communities worldwide across technological, cultural, and political spheres, effectively dissolves traditional barriers of time and distance (Wahyuni et al., 2023). This interconnectedness facilitates unprecedented knowledge exchange and collaborative projects, yet it also introduces complex challenges, including cultural homogenization and moral value conflicts (Ritzer, 2021). Consequently, this dual-natured phenomenon requires educational institutions to strategically harness its benefits while diligently mitigating its risks. Scholars argue that proactive character education serves as a crucial bulwark against the destabilizing influences of foreign cultures and the overwhelming flow of digital information inherent in globalization (Hasibuan et al., 2024).

In this context, character strengthening within madrasahs transcends traditional moral instruction to become a vital instrument for student resilience and global readiness. The relevance of such education has intensified, as students equipped with firmly embedded positive values demonstrate greater adaptability and competitive competence in an interconnected world (Ghofur et al., 2024). Conversely, the absence of strong character foundations can leave students vulnerable, impairing their ability to navigate the uncertainties and ethical dilemmas precipitated by global currents (Dwi Wahyuni et al., 2023). Therefore, madrasahs like MI Cerdas Nurani position character formation not as a supplementary activity but as a core strategic response to global dynamics.

The strategic response at MI Cerdas Nurani is operationalized through the cultivation of three core character principles: cleanliness, orderliness, and discipline. These values are systematically internalized via a structured habit-based curriculum designed to permeate all aspects of student conduct. Cleanliness is promoted as a holistic virtue encompassing speech, physical actions, and inner spiritual purity, fostering self-respect and environmental consciousness. Orderliness is instilled through disciplined academic habits and prosocial behaviors, such as cooperation and mutual respect, which are essential for harmonious communal life in a diverse global society (Sirojudin, 2019).

The principle of discipline is further deepened to encompass obedience to Islamic teachings, the development of personal independence, and the habitual practice of gratitude and prayer. This comprehensive approach ensures that character strengthening is not merely about external compliance but about fostering an internalized ethical compass and spiritual fortitude. By grounding students in these values, the madrasah aims to create a generation capable of engaging with global opportunities while steadfastly preserving their religious identity and moral integrity, thereby directly countering the potential negative impacts of globalization (Amin, 2024). This model illustrates how localized character initiatives can effectively prepare students to be both faithful adherents of their tradition and competent participants in the global arena.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the efforts of the principal of MI Cerdas Nurani in responding to the challenges of globalization are primarily realized through systematic and sustainable character strengthening implemented via the HCL Curriculum. These findings confirm that the leadership of the madrasah principal plays a crucial role in addressing globalization not merely through administrative policies, but through value based curricular innovation and daily character habituation. This is consistent with Japaruddin et al. (2020), who emphasize that school principals are key actors in shaping school culture and ensuring the successful implementation of character education programs.

The HCL Curriculum, which is grounded in three core values cleanliness, orderliness, and discipline reflects a holistic and contextual approach to character education. Character strengthening at MI Cerdas Nurani is not limited to cognitive instruction but is embedded in students' daily religious practices, social behaviors, and life skills. This finding supports previous national studies suggesting that character education becomes more effective when it is internalized through continuous habituation and reinforced by a consistent school culture (Ghofur et al., 2024; Fikri et al., 2023). Through this approach, character is not only taught but also practiced and experienced directly by students.

The implementation of both daily and monthly habits within the HCL Curriculum demonstrates the madrasah's proactive response to the impacts of globalization. The unrestricted flow of information, cultural shifts, and foreign influences associated with globalization pose risks to students' moral development if not balanced by strong character foundations. In this regard, the findings align with Wahyuni et al. (2023), who argue that character strengthening serves as a strategic means to help students adapt to global changes without losing their identity. At the international level, these results are also in line with UNESCO (2022), which highlights the importance of balancing global competencies with local and spiritual values in education systems.

Parental involvement in the HCL program, particularly through the implementation of habits at home and the use of evaluation sheets, indicates that character education at MI Cerdas Nurani extends beyond the school environment into the family context. This collaboration enhances the effectiveness of character strengthening and ensures consistency between school-based values and home practices. This finding supports international research by Epstein (2018), which emphasizes that strong partnerships between schools and families significantly contribute to students' character development and positive behavior.

Furthermore, the emphasis of the HCL Curriculum on self-management reflects the madrasah's awareness that success in the global era depends not only on intellectual ability but also on personal discipline, responsibility, and self-leadership. This finding is consistent with studies by Wahyuni (2023), which suggest that soft skills and character more strongly influence individual success than by technical or hard skills alone. In the context of globalization, self-management becomes a vital competency enabling students to navigate challenges and compete effectively.

This study reinforces both national and international research findings that character education grounded in religious values and sustained habituation is a relevant and effective strategy for addressing the challenges of globalization. The main contribution of this research lies in highlighting the role of madrasah leadership and the HCL Curriculum as a contextual and sustainable model of character strengthening aligned with the goals of Islamic education, namely to produce individuals who are intellectually capable, spiritually grounded, and characterized by noble conduct (*akhlaqul karimah*).

6. Conclusion

The challenges arising from globalization, advances in information technology, and modernization are not something to be avoided, but rather must be faced so that the opportunities created by globalization can lead to success. These opportunities arise from an individual's ability to face various existing challenges, but opportunities do not automatically guarantee success. Good character will make it easier for someone to achieve success in this world and the hereafter in the current era of globalization. With a strong and ingrained good character, a person is not easily influenced by the negative impacts of cultural and information exchange or the loss of religious values and norms as a result of globalization. Strengthening character through the continuity of the HCL Curriculum is an effort undertaken by the Principal of the Smart Nurani Elementary Madrasah in facing the challenges of globalization. Strengthening character through the HCL Curriculum is an innovation in the implementation of character education in elementary madrasahs because it involves parents as the primary environment for children's education and is supported by the exemplary behavior of the principal and teachers.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the leadership of madrasah principals plays a crucial role in responding to the challenges of globalization through continuous character building based on habituation. This study answers the research objectives by demonstrating that the HCL Curriculum is effective in shaping religious, independent, and disciplined character in students. The implications of this study confirm that character education integrated with school culture and involving families can be a strategic model for madrasahs in facing the currents of globalization. Therefore, it is recommended that further research examine the comparative effectiveness of the HCL Curriculum in other madrasahs or develop quantitative evaluation instruments to measure the impact of character building on students' long-term outcomes.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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