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The Implementation of *Salih-Akram* Character Education at Matholiul Falah Islamic Boarding School of Pati

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide a description of character education implemented at Madrasah *Mathali'ul Falah* (Islamic school) Pati – Central Java. It focuses on how *salih-akram* character education is applied. A phenomenological-descriptive approach was employed in this qualitative study. The data were gathered by means of observation techniques, interviews, and document studies relevant to the research theme and focus. The findings revealed that MA Mathali'ul Falah is categorized as a Madrasah Mu'adalah or a Salafi madrasa which is academically focused on tafaquh fi al-din with a management model type of *pesantren*-based madrasa. The *salih-akram* vision is embodied in the Nine Basic Values of Salih-Akram (NSDA) as a character model, which is substantively similar to the universal values regarding good character and citizenship. Successful education and character building of salih-akram at MA Mathali'ul Falah are accomplished as it is applied with a holistically integrated education model in the form of Islamic boarding school-based madrasa. Education does not only refer to formal curriculum (subject-matters), but also to hidden one (habituation and modeling).

Contribution/Originality: The study is one of very few studies which have investigated the integration between formal education (schooling system) and the esteemed Islamic boarding school system (*pesantren*) concerning character education. The exploration of this unique integration offers valuable insights and enriches the existing body of knowledge on this subject matter.

1. Introduction

The mandate that educational institutions in Indonesia must carry out is to produce and prepare future generations into human beings holistically. It is specifically stated in the Constitution of the National Education System No. 20 of 2003. The goals of the National Education are as follows: "*to provide comprehensive education to all Indonesians, fostering their spiritual devotion to the Almighty, cultivating noble character, nurturing knowledge and skills, promoting physical and spiritual well-being, fostering a resilient and self-reliant*

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personality, and instilling a deep sense of social and national responsibility.". By fostering and developing and all human potentials (gifts of perfection), the educational process is expected to bring humans to the accomplishment of a cultural level that upholds human dignity and humanity (Noor, n.d.)

It must be admitted that it is not an easy thing to achieve this goal because it requires a series of processes, hard work, and synergy of all components of the nation's youth. Education as a system demands all subsystems work in accordance with their respective roles. A number of statistics indicate that our educational outputs have fallen short of expectations, particularly in the context of global stage. The human resource quality of our education system has been unable to compete due to various existing shortcomings. An indicator of this is the competitiveness of Indonesia's human resources (HR) which remains in the 50th place out of 141 countries, trailing Malaysia and Thailand, while Singapore is in first place (Santia, 2021).

Another cause, no less worrying, is the moral degradation of young generations, the manifestations of which may be seen in everyday life. Juvenile delinquency contributes to criminal activities, abuse of drugs, motorcycle gangs/gangster, which are very unsettling to society, promiscuity/ premarital sex, and an extensive list of other worrisome cases. These phenomena indicate that character building in our educational institutions is falling short of expectations, resulting in a failure. Nonetheless, a nation's character building is the most important goal of our educational system. However, we also have to agree that the root causes of these bad occurrences are not simply due to our educational system's failure to provide valuable information for determining and selecting future strategies.

Developments in information and communication technology, as well as massive information spread out through the internet must also be understood as factors contributing to our youth generation's moral degradation. Although these technological advancements have undoubtedly contributed to the transformation of the nation's civilization in global stages and competitions, it is nearly impossible to avoid any impacts resulting from changes in human civilization, which have arrived at an era known as the industrial revolution 4.0 and society 5.0 (supersmart society). This change is unavoidable, and it must be met with all of its consequences. Facing these conditions calls for an ability to adapt to, while protecting and preserving one's identity. Character building as well as fostering nationalism are two approaches to dealing with an unpredictable era brought by such rapid changes.

Undoubtedly, current challenges in the field of education are somewhat significant, if not extraordinarily hefty. On one hand, the rapid pace of change brought about by the industrial revolution 4.0 has caused disruptions in various sectors of life, along with industrial sector. On the other hand, the reality indicates that the community's ability to deal with these changes remains far short of what is required, both in terms of infrastructure and psychological readiness. What usually occurs is that the sophistication of information and communication technology is exploited negatively and ineffectively for the future of young generation.

As a sub-system of national educational institutions with the title of schools with Islamic characteristics, madrasa education systems (MI, MTs, and MA) bear an immense responsibility to exist as a prototype for other educational institutions in terms of character building. Historically, the madrasa education systems arose due to the educational institutional transformation of *pesantren* to meet the Muslim community's

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expectations for higher quality education according to the demands of the times. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to claim that the DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) or the origin of Islamic boarding schools and madrasas is Islamic da'wah. This suggests that the existence of Islamic boarding schools and madrasas is to carry out or prolong the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) apostolic mission, which is to produce Indonesian people with characters or morals. This ideal state gives madrasas a broader mission than other types of educational institutions, such as SMA/SMK (Senior High School/Vocational High School), SMP (Junior High School), and SD (Elementary School).

In addition to the possible derivation of the term "Islamic boarding school", this educational institution has long existed and is indigenous to Indonesia, and it was the starting point to the formation the madrasa education systems. Islamic boarding schools, which exist and thrive mostly in Java, are products of cultural acculturation between Islam and local culture. In general, Islamic boarding school education system has five main components: (1) boarding schools, (2) mosques, (3) teaching classic literature (*kitab kuning),* (4) students, and (5) *kyai/*religious clerics (Dhofier, 1994). The goals of Islamic boarding school education are: "It is aimed at preparing and developing a Muslim personality, which refers to believing in and having a fear of God, possessing a noble character, benefitting or serving the community by becoming a public servant adhering to the Prophet Muhammad's personality (following the Prophet's sunnah), being independent, unrestricted and firm in personality, propagating or upholding Islam and the glory of Muslims in the community ('*izzul Islam wal Muslim*), and keeping updated with sciences in order to develop Indonesian personality. The ideal personality is referred to as a Muhsin personality, rather than a Muslim" (Mastuhu, 1994).

As the manifestation of Islamic educational institution with those missions, MA (*Madrasah Aliyah* - Islamic Senior High School) meets numerous challenges in developing young generation's characters with Islamic values and portraying the peaceful image of Islam -*rahmatan lil alamin*. As we all know and feel, one of the threats to Indonesian country today is radicalism and terrorism on behalf of religion (read: Islam). This is due to globalization and the sophistication of information and communication technology, which allows the global population to quickly access contents and learn about numerous facets of life via the internet. Transnational ideology is a tangible evidence of how dangerous information can be if it is propagated by wrong individuals to those who lack an intellectual capacity to comprehend and filter the information received through the internet or social media.

MA *Mathali'ul Falah* Islamic School (MA-PIM), also known as "MA *Matholi*'", is not only a prominent Islamic Senior High School within Pati regency region, but also throughout Central Java province as a madrasa firmly devoted to its mission, called '*tafaqquh fi al-din*' (in-depth Islamic studies). This educational institution adopts the idea of integrating between educational process and boarding school into an integrated education management system. This is what later qualifies MA as a *Madrasah Salaf* and an Islamic boarding school-based madrasa (MA *Mu'dalah*). The MA-PIM's vision and missions are to transform students into excellent human beings. According to Rozin, *Salih-akram* is a transcendental piety in an individual's relationship with God, and someone who has attained the degree of *akram* is the one who fears Allah the most (Nikmah, 2020). If the concept of *salih-akram* is thoroughly examined, it is very much in line with the government's current concern on character building. Character building is substantially more than just teaching children what is right and wrong, it must also establish positive habits, so that they can understand, feel, and have a desire to do good deeds (Fadilah et

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al., 2021). A person is said to have a noble character if he/she has in-depth knowledge of the existing potential and manifests the potential through attitudes and behavior.

Based on the description above, the researchers seeks to investigate more into data related to what and how *salih-akram* is, as well as how curriculum design and learning methods are implemented in building students' characters. A qualitative-descriptive method was employed in this study. Thus, the expected result is to provide a thorough description on the implementation of curriculum model/design at the *pesantren*-based madrasa taking advantages of *salih-akram* values. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a model for other madrasas/Islamic boarding schools in implementing and improving character building.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Islamic Education

2.1.1. Definition

There are three Arabic terms etymologically attached to education: *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'did*. *Tarbiyah* literally means education, while *ta'lim* means teaching. Thus, education and teaching are referred to as "*tarbiyah wa ta'lim*" in Arabic. Meanwhile, Islamic education in Arabic is "*tarbiyah Islamiyah*" (Daradjat, 2004). According to Al-Nahwali (1989), *tarbiyah* has three lexical roots; (1) *rabba-yarbu,* which means to rise, and to grow, as found in the Qur'an (al-Rum: 39); (2) *robiya-yarba,* which means large, and (3) *rabba-yarubbu,* which means to fix, and to control in the context of guiding, protecting and maintaining.

As a term and concept, the word *al-tarbiyah* has several main components: (1) maintaining and strengthening the children's nature with full attention; (2) developing a variety of talents and readiness; (3) directing the children's nature and talents into better performances and perfection; and (4) practicing those continually (Hamzah, 2009). A similar view is shared by Abdurrahman al-Bani (Maksum, 1999), claiming that *tarbiyah* contains three connotative components: (1) protecting and nurturing children, (2) developing children's talents and potentials based on their individual characteristics, and (3) directing potentials and talents to attain righteousness and perfection.

T*a'lim* is derived from the root word *'allama-yu'allimu-ta'lim,* which means 'to know' and 'to inform'. As a term, *ta'lim* is defined as a process of transferring knowledge, comprehension, understanding, responsibility, and reliability, resulting in self-cleaning (*tazkiyah*) from all impurities, preparing oneself to learn wisdom and everything valuable (Jalal, 1977). *Ta'lim,* which is synonymous to teaching, has a narrower scope than *tarbiyah*, which is only in the cognitive aspect. Therefore, according to al-Attas (1992), the cognitive aspects implied in *ta'lim* do not comprise of a fundamental part of the introduction (Al-Attas, 1990). In his opinion, the most suitable term to holistically describe the concept of Islamic education is ***ta'dib*.** This term holistically means science (knowledge), teaching (*ta'lim*), and parenting/education (*tarbiyah*). Therefore, *ta'dib* contributes to several aspects, referring to the essence of interrelated education, such as *'ilm* (knowledge), *'adl* (justice), *hikmah* (wisdom), *'aml* (action), *haq* (truth), *nutq* (reasoning), *nafs* (soul), *qolb* (heart), *aqal* (mind), *marotib* (level-hierarchical order), *ayah* (symbol), and *adab* (good manners).

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Of all three terms, in the context of Islamic education concept, the term *tarbiyah* has more strengths for some reasons; First, *tarbiyah* is more relevant due to its strong transcendental meanings. Although educational activities involve human activities, Islam argues that these activities cannot be separated from and for God. Second, eclectically, the core meanings and connotations of all these terms can be integrated to reinforce the notion of Islamic education. Referring to these considerations, Maksum (2004) states that *tarbiyah* has more social values since the term is more commonly used and/or accepted by Islamic societies (Maksum, 1999).

Based on this linguistic comprehension, experts then created parameters of Islamic education from a number of perspectives, particularly from the relationship between the two concepts: education, and Islam. Tajab et al. (1996) define Islamic education from three perspectives: (1) education of (according to) Islam, (2) education of (in) Islam, and (3) education of Islam (religion). Education of (according to) Islam has a broader normative meaning, therefore, it constitutes an academically philosophical aspect of a study. The second definition asserts that Islamic education is more socio-historical in nature, implying that it constitutes a historical aspect. According to the third definition, Islamic education is more of a practical procedure in the propagation of Islamic religious teachings, and this is a theoretical component of Islamic education.

Based on this understanding, Islamic education is always defined as a process that develops knowledgeable, faithful, and devoted Muslims to Allah. According to Musthofa and Ally (1998), Islamic education is a process of teachers guiding students' physical, spiritual, and intellectual development toward Muslim's character buiding (Mustofa & Aly, 1998). With a focus on inheritance aspect, Zuhairini (2004) define Islamic education as the process of inheriting and developing a human culture rooted and guided by Islamic teachings as stipulated in the Qur'an and explained in the Prophet's *sunnah*. Islamic education, according to Tafsir (2004), is a guidance offered by an individual to another in order to fully develop in accordance with Islamic principles (Tafsir, 2002). In other words, if this knowledge is simplified, it is a guide for an individual to becoming a Muslim holistically. This implies that Islamic education must be an important component of society, preferably more. It must be developed and implemented in accordance with the social context and needs, particularly in terms of its implementation. This is in accordance with the essence of Islamic teachings, which is *rahmatan lil al-'alamin* (Compassion for the Universe).

2.1.2. Goals

Despite given various perspectives, one thing in common from various normative formulations regarding the goals of Islamic education is the Islamic education's primary goal, producing a holistic and perfect Muslim figure. According to Usa (1991), Islamic education ideally seeks to lead people to achieve personal harmony holistically for the sake of comfort in the world and afterlife (Usa, 1991). In a broader sense, the Islamic education's goal is to promote human beings with awareness and responsibility to carry out the mandates of their caliphate, as well as to enrich themselves with knowledge and without knowing limitations, while also realizing that the essence of life and knowledge originate from and leads to Allah.

Daradjat et al. (2004) refer human figure to *insan kamil*, that is, one who is physically and spiritually intact, may live and develop naturally and normally as a result of his/her piety to Allah The Almighty (Daradjat, 2004). This implies that Islamic education is expected to

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produce human beings who are beneficial for themselves and society; those who always feel happy and enthusiasm of practicing and developing Islamic teachings in relation to Allah and with fellow human beings; and those have the capacity to take advantages of the universe for the sake of life in this world and hereafter. Based on these goal formulations which are still general, ideal, and abstract, Daradjat (2004), distinguishes educational goals into; general goals, ultimate goals, interim goals, and operational goals.

According to al-Ghazali, Islamic education is an education committed to producing excellent individuals who will ultimately enjoy a pleasant life in the world and hereafter by drawing closer to Allah by means of the knowledge they have acquired through the educational process (Agus, 2018). Based on this explanation, Islamic Education is Islamic teachings that involve teachers' efforts in fostering and developing human potentials in order to produce good Muslim personality traits.

According to Quraish Shihab, Islamic education aims to develop individuals and groups of people in ways that they can carry out as servants and caliphates of Allah to carry out their roles as servants and caliphates of Allah in order to build this world in accordance with the concepts set by Allah and are devoted to Him (Daimah, 2018). According to Syafe'i (2015), Islamic education has a different style from education in general (Syafe'i, 2015). It sees the relationship between humans, God, and the universe as inseparable. It seeks to educate students about their obligations as creatures of God and community members, as well as to encourage them to become decent and virtuous individuals. who represent *khalifatullah fi al-ardh.*

As an object of Islamic education activities, various formulations of the Islamic education goals typically start with a study of human nature or *fitrah*. In the perspective of Islam, humans are entities endowed with various excellent potentials (gift of perfection), including physical and spiritual, soul and mind, as well as *nafs* (carnal soul) and *qolb* (heart). The concept of Islamic education is holistic-integrated, in the sense that it is not dichotomous, on the basis of this belief. All the potentials in humans are represented as a dynamic organic unit that intertwined one another. Therefore, through educational activities, the various potential perfections bestowed by God must be turned or transformed into actual perfection.

2.1.3. Institutional Format

The normative concept of education, as a cultural product, demands the use of an institution or organization as a tool to attain agreed-upon values. As a form of social institutions, an educational institution is incorporated within organizations that are relatively set on patterns of conduct, as well as directed roles and relationships in binding individuals. Organization, at the same time, must have both legitimate authority and punishments so as to address fundamental human needs (Hendropuspito, 1983). A perticular form of institutions is school system (schooling). According to Brown, A. D. (1989), "Schooling is the institutionalized form of a society's thoughts and ideals regarding education. Schools are designed to protect and nurture the pursuit of educational (and other social) values" (Brown, 1989).

The institutionalization of ideas and concepts of Islamic education as embodied in the formulation of the meanings previously mentioned as well as the goals of Islamic education, turns into very broad and diverse, covering three **educational units**; formal education, non-formal education, and informal education (UUSPN Number 20 of 2003).

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This study referred to the institutional format as the form of institution where the process of Islamic education takes place. As stated by Hasbullah (2001), Islamic educational institutions serve as vehicles or places where the process of Islamic education occurs simultaneously with the acculturation process and it starts from family (Hasbullah, 2001).

Before the emergence of madrasa in general, the Islamic education system, goals and resources in nationwide shared similarities with Islamic education in the early years of the rise of Islam in the Middle East (classic period). The teachers/*ustaz*/*kyai*/*shia* at that time were Muslims studying in the Middle East, either those particularly studying religion or those on pilgrimage . Due to the demands and time changes, the Islamic education's systems and institutions in the classic period eventually went through changes and reformations. As in the Indonesian context, these changes are highly adapted to local (regional) conditions and cultures, the particular goals and visions of the stakeholders and performers of Islamic education in spesific settings.

The interaction and acculturation of Islamic missions in the context of culture and local demands resulted in the the following institutional model of Islamic education, that is, the existence and development of Islamic education is a process of interaction of Islamic missions under three conditions. First, the interaction between Islam and local or indigenous culture –pre-Islamic– founded *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) through acculturation process. Second, the interaction between Islamic educational missions and modern Middle Eastern traditions further established madrasa educational institutions. And third, the interaction between Islam and the Dutch East Indies educational politics resulted in the establishment of Islamic schools (Suwito & Fauzan, 2004).

2.1.4. Madrasa

The term "madrasa" literally means school in Arabic. According to the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 1 of 1952, madrasa is a learning institution regulated as a school adopting Islamic religious education and sciences as subject matters. The madrasa education system has gradually transformed over the years, no longer teaching religious subjects, but also 'general subjects' with the same model and composition as public schools (SD/SMP/SMA). The entire madrasa education process adheres to the government's eight educational standards. This sort of madrasa is entitled public school with Islamic characterization.

There is no agreement among Islamic (educational) historians on when the title 'madrasa' first appeared. Some argued that madrasa was first built and developed in the 5th century H or 10th century AD, and some argued that it was established and developed in the 11th century AD, with the establishment of *Madrasah Nidhamiyah* in 1065 A.D by Nidham al-Mulk, the prime minister the Seljuq dynasty (Asrofah, 1999). A similar opinion was expressed by Philip K. Hitti (Syalabi, 1973)). Whereas, al-Abrasyi (1993), citing al-Maqrizi, claimed that the *Madrasah al-Baihaqiyah* was the first madrasa founded at the end of the 4th century H (10th century AD) (Al-Abrosy, 1979).

Following the Nidham al-Mulk's traditions, Damascus ruler, Nurudin al-Zanky, built several madrasas. He was the first person to build madrasas in Damascus. Throughout its development, these madrasas were also founded and expanded from cities to villages in Syria. The biggest madrasa built by Nuruddin al-Zanky was *Madrasah al-Nuriyah al-Kubra* (Syalabi, 1973). His actions inspired Damascus people to also build madrasas, as did the rulers and al-Zank''s family. These processes continued until the 15th century AD. In the

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14th century AD, there were 60 madrasas upholding Shafi'i school of thought, 52 following Hanafi, 4 adopting Maliki, 10 adhering to Hambali, and 3 al-Tib schools. These madrasas were founded not only by governors, but also by merchants, scholars, and even women. Besides Damascus, many madrasas were also built throughout Islamic world, such as those in Hijaz, Medina, Mecca, Asia Minor, Tunisia, India, and many other places. In general, the subjects taught in each madrasa are nearly identical, such as religious disciplines regarding exegesis, fiqh, and many others, yet each madrasa has its own principles influenced by each school and particular figures.

In Indonesia, this type of madrasa education is divided into three different levels, all of which employ Arabic terminology: *Madrasah Ibtid''iyah* (MI), *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), and *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA). Sequentially, these madrasa educational institutions are equivalent/similar to elementary, junior high, and senior high school educational institutions. In general, madrasa educational institutions can be divided into two types. First, there are public and private madrasas that follow norms and regulations provided by the government, in this case, the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Second, madrasas' institutional existence and learning system are not covered by the government, hence all of their institutional statuses are private. This institution commonly employs the first model of madrasa. It uses the term "*diniyah"* (literally means religious school), hence the terminology used is MI *Diniyah*, MTs *Diniyah*, and MA *Diniyah*.

2.2. Character Education

The term "*karakter*" is etymologically derived from the English word "character". The word *karakter* is defined in Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (2008), as traits, mental qualities, values, or manners that distinguish an individual from another, as well as personality. If it is used in conjunction with the prefix "*be*" (a person with a character), it refers to a person with personality, behavior, character, or nature. The word character is synonymous to personality or *akhlak*. According to Koesoema (2007), personality is a characteristic or specific trait or nature of a person that arises through exposures obtained from the environment, such as family, childhood, and also inherent (Koesoema, 2007).

The term akhlak is derived from "*al-akhlaq*" in Arabic which is the plural form of "*al-khuluq*" which means character, temperament, behavior, or personality (Ya'kub, 1988). According to Ibn Maskawih, *akhlak* is a state of inner activity that pushes towards spontaneous execution of deeds in the lack of cognition. Meanwhile, according to al-Ghazali, *akhlak* is a trait that remains in the soul from which deeds come readily, with no awareness of mind (Djatnika, 1996). In Indonesian word, *akhlaq* is equivalent to the meaning of moral and ethics. These two terms are frequently used interchangeably with manner, morality, conduct, or courtesy (Ismail, 1996). Basically, ethics and moral conceptually have a similar connotation in that they both address human actions and behavior in terms of good and bad values. However, in its application, ethics is more theoretical and philosophical as a reference for analyzing value systems, whereas morality is practical as a standard to assess an individual's action (S''id, 1986: 23-24). Ethics looks into behavior universally, whereas moral looks into it narrowly. In order to apply character, ethics, or moral to a person, a branch of disciplines known as Moral Education, Ethics Education, or Religious Education is introduced.

"How 'good' is a person"? such a question is always associated with character. A person with good character is one who acts in conformity with societal norms and demands. In

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an educational setting, it refers to the goal of education (good people). Suyanto (2009) defines a character as an approach to perceiving and acting that distinguishes each individual in a setting of a family, community, nation, and country. Individuals with good character are those who can make judgments and are willing to accept responsibility for the repercussions of their decisions. As proposed by Thomas Lickona (1991), “character is a persistent inherent drive to react to circumstances in an ethically acceptable way," "How does (good) character develop?" Education is the solution to the question (Lickona, 1991).

Megawangi (2004) defines character building as an effort to educate children to be capable of making wise decisions and putting them into practice in everyday life, so that they may make positive contributions to their environment (Megawangi, 2004). Referring to Fakri (2010), character building is a process of transforming life values to be developed in an individual's personality in order that the values be integrated in the person's life behavior (Fakri, 2010). In a school setting, according to Kesuma (2011), character building is: "learning that leads to strengthening and developing a child's behavior holistically based on a particular value referred to by the school" (Kesuma, 2011). To simply put, character building is "the process of shaping behavior based on a particular value". In the context of education in Indonesia, it is clear that the values referred to as educational references are theocentric and anthropocentric values.

Character building aims to: "nurture students socially, morally, and intellectually by incorporating character building into all aspects of school culture and curriculum; and to assist students in developing good character, involving understanding, nurturing for, and engaging in basic moral values such as dignity, accountability, integrity, transparency, and empathy.” (Lickona, 1991). Such educational concepts and models are often known as holistic education, because "... the highest goal of education is to produce a holistic person capable of addressing life problems comprehensively”. In a school setting, character building aims to: (a) strengthen and develop vital and essential life values to produce students with distinctive personality, adopting those values in life; (b) preserve students’ behavior associated with the values developed by the school; (c) create harmonious relationships with family and society in consistently implementing character building (Kesuma, 2011).

The following are the nine fundamental elements of character developed from fundamental noble principles: (1) devotion to God and His creations; (2) self-reliance and accountability; (3) integrity/commitment, diplomatic; (4) dignity and courtesy; (5) generosity, being accommodative and teamwork; (6) self-esteem and dedication to job duties; (7) management and equity; (8) compassion and modesty; as well as (9) diversity, harmony, and solidarity (Azra, 2003). To accomplish such things, the nine pillars must systematically be taught in a holistic and integrated educational paradigm, such as recognizing what is good, feeling what is good, and practicing it well. According to Zins et al. (2001), character *building* must begin at a young age (golden age), considering (1) this period significantly determines a child’s growing abilities and potentials in the following periods, (2) various intelligences of adolescence have taken place at 4 years of age (Zins, 2001). Empirically, the factor underlying a child's failures at school is not merely cognitive aspect, but mainly associated with their lack of characters (affective aspects), such as self-esteem, teamwork ability, sociability, concentration ability, empathy, and communication ability. According to Goleman (2010), a person’s social performance is 80% determined by emotional quotient (EQ), while the rest 20% is determined by intelligence quotient (IQ) (Goleman, 1996).

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2.3. Islamic Education Curriculum and Missions

The term "*kurikulum*" is derived from "curriculum" in English, which is derived from "*currere*" in Greek, which literally means "running distance", that is, the route between the starting point and the finishing line. In Arabic, the word for curriculum is "*manhaj*", which literally means "bright path" that a person must take in his/her life. In the context of education, curriculum refers to a clear path taken by teachers and students to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and educational values (Addaroini, 2020). According to Act Number 20 of 2003 on National Education System, curriculum is characterized as a series of organized plans for targets, contents, and learning resources as well as strategies for structuring activities of learning to fulfill certain learning objectives."

According to Robert Zaiz in Asnawan (2018), curriculum is a resource of subject matters to be mastered (Asnawan, 2018). Whereas, Ronald Doll as cited by Asnawan (2018) defines curriculum as experiences which are presented to students under school's supervision or direction (Asnawan, 2018). Furthermore, William B. Ragan (Hamdan, 2014) defines curriculum as experiences a child has for which the school bears responsibility (Hamdan, 2014). According to Oemar Hamalik (Addaroini, 2020), curriculum is a written plan emphasizing competencies that must be held in accordance with national standards, subjects that must be learned, and learning experiences that must be required to achieve these abilities, and evaluation that needs to be carried out in order to determine the degree of achievements related to students' abilities in various educational units to maximize their potentials (Addaroini, 2020).

These various definitions reveal two concepts. First, in a specific sense, curriculum is a teaching or educational program plan provided for students to address the skills that must be acquired, the subjects that must be learned, and the learning experiences that must be completed in order to achieve predetermined educational goals. Second, curriculum in its broadest sense involves all aspects, activities, and students' experiences under school's supervision and responsibility, regardless of its intra-or extra-curricular formats in nature, all of which are curriculum in the context of achieving educational goals in school.

Abdul Rahman Salih (Hidayat, 2016), classified curriculum into three domains as contents (materials) to be addressed (studied) or employed as a reference for educational activities, as follows: (a) *al-Ulum al-Diniyah*, normative Islamic studies serving as the foundation for all existing knowledge, (b) *al-Ulum al-Insyaniyah*, which covers social sciences and other subjects related to human beings and their interactions, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, education, etc, (c) *al-Ulum al-Kauniyah*, natural sciences based on principles of exactness, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and others. These three domains correspond to the substantive materials embodied in QS. al-Alaq verse 1-5;

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (1) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (2) اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ (3) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (4) عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (5)

Which means: *Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created-, He created man from a clinging form. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, who taught by (means of) the pen, Taught man that which he knew not* (Q.S. Al Alaq verse 1-5).

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The verses above can be understood as a sign or command on the importance of teaching and learning God principles (religion). The command to read here refers to not only reading the revelation text (*Qouliyah al-Qur'āniyyah* verses), but also reading and learning all phenomena existing in the universe as the God's creations (*al-Kauniyyah* verse). Learning to read the *Qur'āniyyah* verses may lead to religious disciplines such as jurisprudence, monotheism, morality, and the like. Whereas, learning to read the *al-Kauniyyah* verses may generate natural sciences covering physics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, and so on. These verses provide an abundance of knowledge which can be obtained through the process of learning and reading.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to provide a description of character education model applied at *madrasah aliyah mathali'ul falah* kajen, pati, central java-indonesia. a qualitative method was employed in the study, adopting a phenomenological or descriptive qualitative approach. Based on the data gathered, this study pointed out an analysis of the dynamic nature of relationships between observed phenomena through scientific reasoning instead of statistical analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Sugiyono, 2015). In particular, the data were gathered to describe the natural circumstances dealing with character education *Shalih Akram* applied at *Madrasah Aliyah Mathali'ul Falah* Kajen Pati.

The data were classified into two categories: primary and secondary data. The former were obtained from interviews with teachers, students and principal, as well as direct observations on selected activities, and documents related to the school. Meanwhile, the latter were obtained from books, journals, previous studies, and several concepts on character education written by experts. The data collection methods comprised of observations, interviews, and documentation (Creswell, 2009; Sugiyono, 2015). Open observations were conducted, so that all informants could freely provide information regarding the implementation of character education. Informant were purposively selected as the research subjects. Purposive sampling, according to Sugiono (2015), is a sampling technique with particular considerations to make the data from the research results more representative.

Interviews were carried out on primary data sources in the form of conversations to obtain information regarding the research focus. Furthermore, the documentation process was conducted in order to collect various documents in the form of concepts and theories related to the subject under study as a theoretical foundation and material to confront with the findings of the study (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation was used to test validity of the data. After the data collected, they were then processed and analyzed in three stages, (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) data verification (Sugiyono, 2015). These three components were collaborative and interconnected. At the data reduction stage, significant, meaningful, and relevant data were classified and sorted. Following that, those data were presented with a suitable textual framework, so that readers could understand it. The conclusions could finally be drawn (Creswell, 2009).

4. Result

4.1. Basic Concept of Salih-Akram

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Salih-akram is a concept formulated and developed by the leaders (teachers/ *mashayekh*) of the Islamic Education Foundation (YPIM) of *Mathali'ul Falah,* Pati – Central Java. This concept is an effort to provide the institution with a direction or vision in resonse to current and future challenges. As explained by Abdul Ghafar Rozin (a prominent YPIM figure), the word "*salih*" means "horizontal virtue", "reading the signs of times", and also "managing life on earth in accordance with the demands of the times". Whereas, "*akram*" means "transcendental piety in human relations with God". Therefore, someone who has attained the degree of *akram* is one who is fearful of Allah the most (Hariroh, 2021).

The idea and formulation of *salih-akram* character was inspired by KH. Ahmad Sahal Mahfud. The term *salih* is generated by the content of the Qur'an Surah al-Anbiya verse 105. *Salih* in this verse, according to his interpretation and comprehension, is interpreted as those with suitability and eligibility to carry out the task of benefiting the entire globe. The term *akram* is generated by the Qur'an Surah Al Hujurat verse 13. In this verse, *akram* is interpreted as a piety to God the Almighty, referring to a person who has a high piety to his/her God. Human beings, as creatures with the mandate to regulate and take control of the earth (*khalifatullah fil ard),* must be competent and having a pleasant disposition in order to constantly be based on *adab fauqol ilmi*, harmonizing *salih* and *akram* values.

Being a good person (*salih*) is not an instant process. It involves challenging processes, but that does not make it impossible. Even though we believe that guidance (*hidayah*) is definite and always present, and that if Allah wishes "*kun wayakun*", then anything is possible. Education is a measurable approach to make people better through the use of various resources, methods, and strategies. As stated by Nikmah (2020), if people cannot reach the *salih* degree, it is appropriate to start with "الحب ", which means "love for pious (*salih*) people", "respect for teachers or lecturer", or engaging with religious figures for blessings (Nikmah, 2020). Thus, by learning from and adhering to Muslim scholars or *kyai*, people will be able to live a life in accordance with Allah's commands. In addressing this, K.H. Ahmad Yasir (a MA-PIM teacher/caretaker), quoting a verse from Imam Syafi'i, states "شفاعة بهم أنال أن لعلي # منهم ولست الصالحين أحب" (Although I don't belong to pious (*salih*) people, I adore them, and wish I can be a mediator thereupon).

In the perspective of organizational vision, *salih-akram* is the YPIM's principal vision as well as its symbolic characteristics as a madrasa with *tafaqquh fi ad-din* model. Through the vision and mission, the education programs at all levels of *Madrasah Matholi'ul Falah* are expected to produce and train cadres of the nation as human beings through religious comprehension in terms of theory and practice, so that they have a capacity to actively contribute to their country (*salih*) in the spirit of noble and commendable deity (*akram*) as demonstrated by the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Mahfuds, 2012).

4.2. *Salih-Akram* as the Character Essence

What is the core concept of how humans should live and how to attain it? To answer the question, the creators of *salih-akram* concept broke it down into several basic values that serve as operational standards for the education and learning process at MA-PIM. The *NDSA* (*Nilai-nilai Dasar Salih Akram* or *Salih Akram* Basic Values) is made up of nine operational values and 1 complementary value, as follows:

a. ***Al-Khirs***; deep love and curiosity for science and knowledge as a source of learning motivation that is unaffected by time and age.

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b. ***Al-Amanah***; honesty, a fundamental characteristic that every individual needs to have. In this context, honesty is seen as a trait as well as an effort to avoid mutually harmful rivalry.
c. ***Al-Tawadhu'***; humility, where modesty and humbleness are manifested in speech and conduct in the context of social interactions.
d. ***Al-Istiqomah***; discipline in the form of regulation compliance, commitment, and agreement as well as other forms, such as time respect, and adherence to responsibility accomplishment.
e. ***Al-Uswah al-Hasanah***; role model, as the primary concept in the leadership, which is manifested in communication skills that are open, democratic, serving as an exemplary figure for other people, as well as prepared to lead and be led.
f. ***Al-Zuhd***; not materialistic, this characteristic is seen as an attempt to avoid material goods and positions; rather, it is understood as a means of employing these two things as a means of gaining Allah's blessings.
g. ***Al-Kifah Al-Mudawamah***; the courage to take risks and create new things for the development of people, nation, and religion without personal gain.
h. ***Al-I'timad ala an-Nafs***; independence, a trait to always avoid relying on other people.
i. ***Tawasuth***; an effort to identify common ground between various different understandings and perspectives, yet without being extremist to address an issue.
j. ***Al-Barakah***; getting more proficient, blessing is both a supplementary and complement element to all components described above.

The formulation and elaboration of *salih* and *akram* concept, as recognized by teachers, *mashayekh* and founders of the *Perguruan Islam Mathali'ul Falah* (PIM), are reflected from the values of Islamic boarding schools. The PIM scholars stricve to adopt the foundation of the school's typical values. It implies that NDSA characters are the fundamental values reinforced in students with all materials, methods, and strategies. The NDSA is technically formulated into several indicators referring to the guidelines developed by K.H. Muhammad Sahal Mahfud as the *mashayekh* (founder) of LPIM. If analyzed meticulously, the points in the NDSA are substantially identical to or referring to universal character values and character-building concept proposed by experts, as described in the sub-chapter above.

4.3. Design and Implementation of MA-PIM Character Building

The curriculum currently employed as a reference in the educational process at MA-PIM is the continuation of curriculum implemented by the previous *mashayekhs* (senior figures). This refers to the principles embodied in the *lafadz* اِنَّا وَجَدْنَاأٰبَآءَنَا كَذَالِكَ يَفْعَلُوْ (we found our fathers or ancestors doing so). There were no valid documents or evidences regarding when the curriculum began. However, one thing is for sure: the curriculum at MA-PIM remains the same as it was in Mecca in the 19th century, when K.H. Ahmad Mahfud studied and stayed in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. According to KH. Ahmad Nailul Faiz, the curriculum applied at MA-PIM shares substantial similarities with that at *Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo,* Kediri and *Pondok Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) in Sarang Rembang. It is possibly due to the fact that many students from the two Islamic boarding schools studied jointly in Mecca.

Although MA-PIM was founded in 1965 under K.H. MA Sahal Mahfud's leadership, the embryo of the establishment was pioneered by Kyai Abdussalam in 1912 in terms of MI (Islamic elementary school) and MTs (Islamic junior high school) education formats. Adopting this, a higher Islamic educational institution was later founded in order to

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accelerate programs regarding with the preparation of future cadres with religious knowledge (*tafaqquh fiddin*) mastery, to draw closer to Allah (*akram*), and to be equipped with professional capabilities (*salih*). The emergence of madrasa was inseparably related to the Dutch colonial government's policy on prohibiting traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) that invited people to assemble. By establishing madrasa as a center/place of learning, the Dutch did not put any suspicions.

The implementation of the *salih-akram* values-based curriculum at MA-PIM is based on consideration that students will immediately engage in real life with society after graduating. Therefore, they (students/*santri*) must be equipped with basic knowledge and practical skills in Islam, social sciences, linguistics, natural sciences, and reasoning abilities. The entire materials and learning methods are disseminated within the NDSA frameworks. This process is aimed at preparing students to become *salih* and *akram* with following characteristics, such as displaying scholarly conduct, being devoted to *nashrul ilmi* (disseminating knowledge) and benefitting *ummah* (society), and being capable of developing the fundamental Islamic knowledge.

With all of these changes taking place through the years, MA-PIM positively responded them by reviewing and developing in accordance with the needs of the context. The inclusion of several "general subjects" indicates that this educational institution pays attention to the needs of its graduates in society once they graduate. Nonetheless, the addition of those general subjects has little effect on the amount of study hours, in which *Mata Pelajaran Agama* (Religious Subjects) takes up 70% of the study time, and *Mata Pelajaran Umum* (general subjects) amounts for 30%. This composition indicates that the MA-PIM curriculum seeks to integrate the goals of national education and the great ideals of the *Perguruan Islam Mathali'ul Falah*, which is to prepare students with capacity to discover, live, practice, and develop Islam holistically, as well as to deal with social issues. In terms of this curriculum structure and composition, MA-PIM, as a madrasa-based education system, adopts the idea of *pesantren* education, often known as Islamic Boarding School-Based Madrasa. Among the general subjects added to the MA-PIM curriculum are *Pendidikan Moral Pancasila* (Pancasila Moral Education) and Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan (Civic Education).

Another name or title attached to MA-PIM is Madrasah Salaf. The title refers to the characters of tafaqquh fi ad-din (religious studies), education, and learning provided to improve religious knowledge and to equip students with noble characters as well as being prepared and competent in dealing with a rapidly changing world. The religion in this context, according to K.H. Sahal Mahfud, is Islam, aiming at educating and preparing national cadres as human beings who thoroughly comprehend the religion both in terms of in theory and practice in order to play an active role in life of the nation (*salih*) in the spirit of divinity with nobility and praiseworthy (*akram*) as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In order to assess the implementation of *salih-akram* character building, it must be distinguished between the periods preceding and following the formation of the curriculum team (curriculum reviewers and developer team). Before the curriculum team was formed, the methods for internalizing NDSA were demonstrated through the examples of natural *mashayekh's* conducts (hidden curriculum). Teachers typically introduced moral and character values (insertion models) in all subjects between learning activities. Once curriculum team was formed, the stages carried out in NDSA Education became more systematic since the curriculum was structured in such a way that NDSA internalization was designed formally and systematically.

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Contents (teaching materials) and learning methods (strategies) have been formulated referring to the accomplishments (understanding) and actions (charity) of *salih* and *akram* characters. From the description above, when analyzed in terms of education management, MA-PIM adopts/applies the holistic-integrated education management model. That is, the domains in the educational process include various gifts of perfection – physically and spiritually, mind and soul, *nafs* and *qolb*. All of these potentials are viewed as dynamically interacting living entities that must be developed or manifested into actual perfection.

4.4. The NDSA Character Education Strategy

In order to achieve *salih* and *akram* characters*,* it requires learning materials that contribute to the achievement of those characters. The materials that must be mastered in this case is *Ulumuddin* (religious sciences). The concept of *tafaqquh fi ad-din* (understanding religious topics) is introduced on the basis of this logical reasoning. Understanding religious studies is required in order to achieve *salih* and *akram*, as *salih* is not necessarily *faqih fi ad-din*. Hence, if *salih* is *faqqih fi ad-din,* it can lead a person to be a light for his/her social environment, with the hope that he/she will someday be a scholar who provides light for those around him/her. According to the Deputy Director of curriculum's assessment and explanation, the contents in the MA-PIM curriculum constitute *salih-akram*, such as materials derived from the book entitled *Ta'limul Muta'allim,* which does not only teach about being good to people, but also to God and His Prophets.

In terms of *aqida* education (*tawhid* – belief in Oneness of Allah), it is also associated with *salih-akram* education. The outputs and outcomes of this learning are to nurture the characters of accepting everything sincerely because you believe that everything in this world belongs to Allah the Almighty. Similarly, *Tasawuf* lesson, as a subject-matter, points out more on aspects related to *akhlak karimah* (nobleness) in horizontal (among humans) and vertical relationships (worship of Allah). A well-organized and well-designed learning environment (physical and non-physical) which promotes good conduct habituation (*amaliyah*) as a reflection and manifestation of *salih-akram* characters are equally significant as well.

The atmosphere of habituation and role-modeling is also quite evident, as indicated by the teachers (based on the interviews) and clearly seen (observation) in daily life in the madrasa/*pesantren*. Such conditions suggest that a vital concept or stressing point in *salih-akram* character building is through the teachers or *mashayekh'*s role-models. The important thing that supports the effectiveness of *salih-akram* character building is environment and culture (atmosphere) available at *Mathali'ul Falah,* which truly contribute to character building because an educative culture has been created. Anyone enrolled at PIM will find it easy to adapt to their surroundings. When someone joins *Mathali'ul Falah*, directly or indirectly, they must adhere to *Mathali'ul Falah*'s traditions. Without even noticing it, everyone in LPIM will behave according to *salih-akrom* characters. This implies that MA-PIM employs a learning strategy habituation based on the concepts of knowing what is good, feeling what is good, and practicing what is good.
As clarified by K.H. Mu'in Ni'am, *salih-akram* character belongs to PIM *mashayekh,* such as K.H. Ahmad Sahal Mahfud, K.H. Ahmad Nafi' Abdillah, K.H. Zakki Fuad Abdillah, and K.H. Muadz Thohir, because they do not only embody high virtue, but also a strong foundation in sharia, and have a fighting commitment in propagating Islamic *da'wah* through education. To ensure that teachers may serve as role models for students, they follow the

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rules (code of ethics) as PIM teachers. Therefore, if there are teachers who do not follow the guidelines, there will be a mechanism to rectify/reprimand by those in charge.

The interesting part about the MA-PIM learning activities is that the teaching and learning methods and materials employed by the teachers in building *salih-akram* character is through imitating (read: replicating) what the previous *mashayekhs* or senior teachers did. Furthermore, the teachers and caretakers' conducts consistently serve as an exemplary role model for students, all of which refer to NDSA values. Dealing with the graduate profiles produced by the MA-PIM learning system, K.H. Ahmad Sahal Mahfud pointed out that the MA-PIM education program is is committed to preparing (the students), instead of shaping (them). The word "prepare" means to provide information as much as possible through a variety of learning activities. On the basis of this perspective, the MA-PIM's role model in character building at is derived from the exemplary conducts displayed by the teachers and *mashayekhs*. This method, as acknowledged by the teachers as well as the students, is more effective in the process of NDSA values internalization.

The *salih-akram* character building is proven to have gained success through several MA-PIM graduates who earned credits by the public for occupying public positions, such as K.H. Ahmad Sahal Mahfud with his accomplishment as the President of Nahdatul Ulama Organization (*Rais Aam* PBNU*)* along with the chairman of the Head Office of Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Kyai Imam Aziz who was named as an Indonesian multicultural figure by the Islamic Fair of Indonesia (IFI) organization, Ulil Abshar Abdalla as the Director of the Research and Development Institute of Human Resources (*Lakpesdam NU*), Marwan Ja'far as a member of *DPR* (the House of Representatives) of the Republic of Indonesia in 2009 as well as the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration for the 2014-2016 period, Badriyah Fayumi as a member of *DPR* (the House of Representatives) of the Republic of Indonesia as well as the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama, and so on.

Despite the fact that the curriculum design implemented at MA-PIM does not fully adopt the curriculum set by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the institutional and academic legitimacy of its educational process and outputs are officially recognized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the stakeholder and authorized party of madrasa education. The recognition is stated in the MA-PIM format, which is legally recognized as *Madrasah Mu'adalah*, an Islamic education unit organized by and within the *pesantren* environment through the curriculum development in accordance with the unique characteristics of *pesantren* on the basis of *kitab kuning* (classic literature) or *dirasah Islamiyah,* with a hierarchical and structured pattern of *muallimin* education that corresponds to the levels of primary and secondary education in the Ministry of Religious Affairs (the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 18 of 2014). In terms of competence, MA-PIM graduates gain more values in mastery of the basic and development of Islam than other public MA graduates despite their school's **Islamic characteristics** status. Another result of the government's recognition of this education system is the inclusion of general subjects in the madrasa curriculum, such as social sciences, linguistics, natural sciences and reasoning, and the like. Another advantage of the *Mu'adalah* status is that MA-PIM retains full autonomy in various aspects, starting from its curriculum (teaching materials), learning models, management systems, and other educational technical issues. This institutional status and condition allow MA-PIM to effectively implement and develop a model of *salih-akram* character building.

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5. Conclusion

Referring to the findings described above, the conclusion can be drawn that the following points are important: First, the character building model with *salih-akram* values adopted at MA-PIM has proven to be effective in developing its students' characters in accordance with the institution's vision. The development of the *salih-akram* concept by teachers, community members, and madrasa managers suggests that through autonomy and spirit of school-based management, it possibly promotes a region's local wisdom and uniqueness to make it global – think globally, act locally. Second, the dominant factor for the success of *salih-akram* character building at MA-PIM is through modeling (*uswatun khasanah*) shown by the teachers, *mashayekhs*, and madrasa community in a hidden curriculum format, where things in the environment (madrasa area) is a form of curriculum that prepares students to do or to not do according to the NDSA values. This does not necessarily mean that formal curriculum is of little significance, it is indeed important. In order to attain NDSA values, a student must learn religious norms or sciences as well as other subjects stipulated in the curriculum in accordance with the following stages of character building: knowing what is good, feeling what is good, and practicing what is good. At MA-PIM, *Ulumuddin* (religious studies) at MA-PIM is taught using the *pesantren* learning model with *kitab kuning* (*classic literature*) resources as a reference for teaching materials. This learning model, therefore, earned MA-PIM the title of *madrasah salaf* model with *tafaquh fi ad-dien.* Third, the curriculum structures at MA-PIM in terms of content (subjects) can be divided into three categories: basic (fundamental/principal teachings of Islam or *Ulumuddin*), supplementary (additional knowledge/tools to support basic components), and complementary (general knowledge). In terms of assessment system, two assessment models have been implemented: (1) learning assessment for promotion grades, and (2) learning assessment for graduation. Fourth, MA-PIM was recognized as *Madrasah Mua'adalah* due to its reputation and accomplishments in religious studies learning in the category of *tafaquh fi ad-dien*. Since the religious studies learning model adopted the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) model, MA-PIM received the title of *Madarasah Salaf* or Islamic boarding school-based madrasa.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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