



Democratic Leadership and IMTAQ: Strengthening Islamic Culture at MAN 2 Muaro Jambi, Indonesia

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Abstract: Social transformation and technological advancement present significant challenges for madrasah institutions in preserving their Islamic identity and fostering student character development. One strategic approach involves strengthening Islamic culture through effective madrasah leadership and structured developmental programs. This study aims to analyze the role of democratic leadership exercised by madrasah principals in cultivating Islamic culture through the Faith and Piety Program (Program Iman dan Taqwa/IMTAQ) at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, Indonesia. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Informants comprise the madrasah principal, teachers responsible for program activities, and selected students. Data analysis was conducted through stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings demonstrate that democratic leadership enables active participation of teachers and staff in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the IMTAQ Program. Core activities include dhuha prayer, congregational dzuhur prayer, recitation of Surah Yasin, religious talks (kultum), and memorization of prayers and short verses, which consistently foster worship discipline and student religiosity. Supporting factors encompass collaboration among all madrasah community members and the availability of worship facilities, while primary obstacles include time constraints and diverse religious backgrounds among students. These findings reinforce the theoretical framework that democratic leadership plays a strategic role in shaping school culture based on Islamic values. Research implications include the necessity of integrating similar programs into national education policy to strengthen Islamic character education, serving as a practical leadership model for other Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: Democratic Leadership, Islamic Culture, IMTAQ Program, Madrasah, Character Education

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah, as Islamic educational institutions, face substantial challenges in maintaining their Islamic identity amid globalization currents and shifting social values (Holdi et al., 2023). Madrasah principals play a central role not only in administrative management but also in establishing educational vision grounded in Islamic values (Astuti and Danial, 2019). Effective leadership becomes the foundation for developing religious and character-based school culture (Mar'atul Azizah, 2020). Within this context, strengthening Islamic culture represents a crucial strategy for producing generations with moral resilience and social responsibility (Asmarani et al., 2022). Therefore, examining the role of madrasah principals in building Islamic culture becomes relevant to ensure the continuity of Islamic values within formal educational institutions (Maunah, 2017).

The democratic leadership variable was selected because it provides extensive participatory space for teachers, staff, and students in decision-making processes (Kirom and Susilo, 2019). This approach creates opportunities to build ownership toward religious programs, particularly IMTAQ, which aims to systematically instill faith and piety values (Ina Susiana, 2022). The IMTAQ program in madrasah serves as a strategic instrument in shaping moral character, faith, and student piety both within the school environment and broader community (Hasanah, 2017). Implementation of activities such as dhuha prayer, congregational dzuhur prayer, Surah Yasin recitation, religious talks, and prayer memorization has proven effective in worship habituation (Fitriani and Saumi, 2018). The combination of democratic leadership and IMTAQ programs has the potential to generate Islamic culture that transcends mere formality, becoming internalized within madrasah community behavior (Ayatullah, 2022).

Several studies have examined the role of madrasah principals in building school culture based on Islamic values. Astuti and Danial (2019) affirm that participatory leadership can create conducive and religious madrasah culture. Fitriani and Saumi (2018) demonstrate that IMTAQ programs effectively shape noble character, although implementation often encounters time and participation constraints. Zaki (2017) indicates that religious program success is significantly influenced by implementation consistency and support from all stakeholders. However, most studies still separate discussions of leadership and IMTAQ, leaving the synergistic relationship between both elements inadequately analyzed comprehensively.

This research offers novelty by simultaneously examining the interconnection between democratic leadership of madrasah principals and IMTAQ program effectiveness in strengthening Islamic culture. This approach fills the gap in previous studies that have not linked both variables within a holistic madrasah operational framework. Critical analysis is conducted to assess how leadership styles influence levels of participation, discipline, and internalization of Islamic values among students (Irmawati, 2021; Kiki Puspitasari and Anwar Sadullah, 2023). Research findings are expected to be not merely descriptive but also provide strategic recommendations replicable in other madrasah institutions. Thus, this study holds both academic and practical significance for developing sustainable Islamic culture development models in Islamic educational institutions (Kiki Puspitasari, 2023).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to comprehensively portray the role of democratic leadership exercised by madrasah principals in strengthening Islamic culture through the Faith and Piety Program (IMTAQ) (Prastya and Susila, 2020). The research location is Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, selected purposively due to its structured IMTAQ program. Data collection occurred from December 2023 to February 2024 through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Primary data sources include the madrasah principal as key informant, teachers responsible for program activities, and selected students, while secondary data derive from activity documents and evaluation reports (Kristanto, 2018). Research instruments comprise semi-structured interview guides and observation sheets developed based on educational leadership theory and Islamic culture frameworks. Informant selection employed purposive sampling techniques to ensure relevance and depth of obtained information.

Data analysis utilized the Miles, Huberman and Saldaña model encompassing data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing verified through source and method triangulation. Finding credibility was maintained through member checking and peer debriefing to examine interpretation consistency. Observations focused on core program activities including dhuha prayer, congregational dzuhur prayer, Surah Yasin recitation, religious talks, and memorization of prayers and short verses. Document analysis was employed to strengthen interview and observation results while assessing implementation alignment with program guidelines. Ethical considerations included obtaining official permission from madrasah authorities and voluntary informed consent from all participants. Informant identities were kept confidential to ensure research integrity and ethics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Democratic Leadership at MAN 2 Muaro Jambi

The success or failure of an organization is determined by its leadership, namely the willingness of others to follow the leader's directives. Effective leadership forms the foundation of organizational success and constitutes a vital force in management. Therefore, the capacity to motivate individuals to execute leadership directives represents a fundamental component of leadership. Tasks are assigned to subordinates who are trusted to perform them according to their competencies, and leaders bear responsibility for ensuring proper implementation (Tanyid, 2018).

As the principal of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, the madrasah head employs a democratic leadership approach. Through the IMTAQ program at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, the principal routinely involves staff and teachers in fostering Islamic culture. Democratic leadership involves group leaders who consult with their members regarding their concerns and allow them to share thoughts and recommendations (Kirom and Susilo, 2019).

This democratic leadership style represents a leadership approach that emphasizes problem-solving through deliberation while considering input from teachers and staff at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi.

The madrasah principal at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi employs a democratic leadership style, enabling all madrasah community members to contribute to the success of the IMTAQ program. This conclusion is based on interview findings. Through the researcher's observations, the madrasah leadership ensures subordinate participation in every activity. This aligns with Bill Woods' perspective in Kirom and Susilo (2019), stating that democratic leadership style provides opportunities for group members or subordinates to express opinions and prioritize their interests. At Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, it is clearly evident that the principal consistently involves staff and teachers in Islamic culture development through the IMTAQ program.

The madrasah leadership employs a democratic leadership approach in fostering Islamic culture through the IMTAQ program. This is evident from the positive relationships between madrasah leadership and teachers. Besides motivating and advising subordinates about the importance of implementing this program effectively for students, the principal consistently involves them in decision-making processes.

The researcher's observations of the principal's leadership in fostering Islamic culture demonstrate this approach. Through supervision, mentoring, and involving all parties to ensure program success, the principal plays a crucial role in managing madrasah activity implementation, particularly the IMTAQ program. This aligns with Hartanto's (2009) assertion that madrasah principals serve not only as role models in achieving program objectives but also as moral exemplars for individuals under their supervision.

The principal actively supervises and assists ongoing activities while providing necessary facilities, consistent with interview findings. By establishing duty schedules, the madrasah director also involves all staff and teachers in fostering Islamic culture through the IMTAQ program.

The activities conducted in developing Islamic culture through the IMTAQ program include dhuha prayer. Dhuha prayer is a voluntary prayer performed during morning hours. Dhuha prayer time begins when the sun rises to its zenith (Subhan, 2011). The implementation of Dhuha prayer at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi has proceeded successfully, evidenced by student enthusiasm in performing Dhuha prayer. This exemplifies the implementation of the sixth primary madrasah objective, namely habitualizing Dhuha prayer so students develop consciousness and ability to ground their daily thoughts, behaviors, and actions in Islamic teachings and values.

The researcher's observations of Dhuha prayer implementation at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi demonstrate this success. Students can practice and internalize Islamic teachings through the IMTAQ curriculum implemented at this madrasah. Regardless of race, religion, and nationality, students are habituated to become virtuous individuals through various activities that enhance faith and piety. This aligns with Umikar's (2021) assertion that Dhuha prayer must be performed by Muslims due to its several virtues, including strengthening faith and piety, facilitating sustenance acquisition, preventing immoral acts, and easing daily activities.

Guidelines for performing Dhuha prayer further establish that the prayer should be performed when night has receded and the sun has slightly risen. During these times, Allah is very close to His servants and will not abandon them.

This means that during dawn, when the sun begins to rise, divine guidance is revealed, providing opportunities for believers to maintain open minds and welcome the blessings He will bestow.

Daily, students conduct Dhuha prayer in the mosque within the madrasah environment, based on the researcher's field observations. This represents the implementation and manifestation of Islam through the IMTAQ program. However, certain students do not participate in prayer, clearly due to lateness, whether from other matters or inadequate time management. Nevertheless, efforts to make Dhuha prayer an integral part of student character and behavioral development at the madrasah continue.

Worship Habituation Practices through the IMTAQ Program

Worship habituation practices through the IMTAQ Program at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi constitute one of the primary strategies for instilling religious values and continuously shaping students' Islamic character. This program is designed to habituate students to perform worship consistently through a series of structured activities, including congregational prayer, collective Surah Yasin recitation, seven-minute religious talks (*kultum*), and memorization of prayers and short verses. Each activity functions not merely as worship routine but also as character education, discipline development, and Islamic brotherhood strengthening within the madrasah environment. Activity implementation involves active student participation both as implementers and officers, fostering self-confidence, communication skills, and social responsibility. Through this habituation pattern, the IMTAQ Program becomes an important instrument for madrasahs in building Islamic culture that is not only embedded in the school environment but also carried into family and community life.

1. Congregational Prayer

According to Islamic law, prayer constitutes worship directed to Allah SWT consisting of specific recitations and actions beginning with takbir and ending with salam. Linguistically, prayer means supplication. Conversely, "*jama'ah*" derives from the verb *Al-Ijtima'u*, meaning to gather, and in its grammatical sense refers to meeting, group, or collective. Congregational prayer represents the second activity organized by Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi. This program aims to motivate students to regularly perform timely prayers in both personal and academic life. Congregational prayer is intended to help students unite more in worship, increase discipline, and foster brotherhood among madrasah community members. Additionally, this activity helps strengthen Islamic brotherhood bonds among students.

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi's development of student faith and piety through congregational dzuhur prayer activities represents implementation of the madrasah vision that can foster student faith through this congregational prayer habituation. This is evident from the researcher's observation that congregational dzuhur prayer is mandatory for all students at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, conducted in the mosque with established officer schedules for congregational dzuhur prayer implementation. This aligns with Aljaawi's (2022) assertion that prayer constitutes an obligation for Muslims, and prayer habituation leads students to become disciplined in fulfilling their obligations as

students. Prayer contains fundamental legal norms and obligations that serve as measures of faith and piety within individual Muslims.

2. *Reading Surah Yasin Together*

The habit of reading the Qur'an consistently every week is known as the habit of reading Surah Yasin. The purpose of this habituation process is not only to help students learn material or become proficient in performing it but also to motivate them to do so consistently every day.

Through Surah Yasin reading habituation, this represents a series of processes that must be performed by all students every Friday morning before kultum in the mosque, except for female students who are menstruating, who are only permitted to remain in the front courtyard of the mosque. This activity is led by assigned students. Based on the researcher's observations, conducting collective Surah Yasin reading can train students to become accustomed to performing it wherever they are. This aligns with Rabiah, Indri Astuti (2014) stating that the Surah Yasin reading habituation process is not only performed to know or be able to implement it but to be endeavored to perform it daily in life.

3. *Kultum (Seven Minutes Religious Talks)*

Kultum constitutes a brief lecture method in delivery, namely conveying something to many people with limited time duration. In developing Islamic culture through the IMTAQ Program at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi, kultum is implemented by assigned students after Yasin recitation, aligning with the madrasah's vision and mission of fostering courteous, ethical, and highly aesthetic attitudes and personalities.

This is evident from the author's observation that kultum implementation occurs after Yasin recitation on Fridays with students as kultum implementation officers previously assigned. This aligns with Ardianto's (2019) assertion that kultum constitutes something highly effective in spreading goodness within the madrasah environment and other individuals, and kultum can transform less favorable human behavior to become better or enhance individual faith and piety quality.

4. *Memorization of Prayers and Short Verses*

IMTAQ program implementation involves not merely material from teachers but teaches students to participate directly in duties, fostering self-confidence and ability. This aligns with field observation results regarding implemented programs, showing that students can practice abilities and apply their capabilities not only in the madrasah environment but also in society. This corresponds with Jumahir's (2022) opinion that the IMTAQ program is intended to enhance students' ability to integrate and apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills learned into community life.

Discussion

The IMTAQ program at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi serves as a distinctive characteristic differentiating this institution from other schools through scheduled and consistent worship activity implementation. Activities such as congregational prayer, dhuha prayer, memorization deposits, teacher memorization checks, and Friday yasinan and kultum are not merely executed as routines but as student character formation means. This aligns with Irmawati's (2021) assertion that Islamic culture constitutes an important non-material asset

for the sustainability of excellent Islamic educational institutions. Values, customs, and optimistic perspectives embedded in Islamic culture are manifested through worship habits at madrasah. These activities demonstrate how worship habituation can strengthen students' religious identity.

The madrasah principal's leadership plays a central role in ensuring effective program implementation through direct involvement in various activities. The principal serves not only as supervisor but also as an exemplar present with students in every worship activity. This involvement increases togetherness and encourages active student participation. This approach reflects democratic leadership style that involves all parties in the development process. Thus, participatory leadership becomes an important factor in religious value internalization among students.

Positive impacts of the IMTAQ program extend to student life outside madrasah, including family and community environments. Students demonstrate habits of performing worship independently and maintaining Islamic behavior in daily life. This finding aligns with Ina Susiana's (2022) assertion that IMTAQ programs can enhance faith, piety, and *akhlakul karimah* not only at school but also in broader social realms. This indicates that worship habituation-based programs have sustainable effects on student behavior. Habits embedded at school prove to be carried into broader environments.

Synergy between structured program design, exemplary leadership, and active participation of all madrasah community members becomes the key to successful Islamic culture development at MAN 2 Muaro Jambi. These three factors mutually reinforce each other, creating a conducive environment for student religious attitude development. Clear activity structure ensures implementation consistency, while principal leadership maintains motivation and discipline among all parties. Active teacher and student participation serves as the driving force for program sustainability. The result is Islamic culture that is not merely formal but also lived in daily life.

Research implications indicate that worship habituation programs such as IMTAQ can serve as strategic models for Islamic culture strengthening in other Islamic educational institutions. Success lies in integrating religious activities into non-formal curriculum consistently implemented with full leadership support. Additionally, involving all parties, from teachers and staff to students, becomes an important factor ensuring program sustainability. This research also opens opportunities for developing activity innovations relevant to contemporary challenges without reducing the essence of Islamic values. Thus, research findings can serve as reference for madrasah and other schools in designing character development programs based on religious values.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that democratic leadership of madrasah principals plays a significant role in strengthening Islamic culture through IMTAQ program implementation at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Muaro Jambi. Teacher, staff, and student involvement in program planning and evaluation has created ownership and increased effectiveness of activities such as *dhuha* prayer, congregational prayer, Surah Yasin recitation, *kultum*, and prayer memorization. These findings

strengthen the theory that participatory leadership styles can encourage religious value internalization within Islamic educational environments. The theoretical implications of this research expand understanding of synergy between democratic leadership and religious development programs in shaping school culture. Practically, research results can serve as reference for other madrasah in designing similar sustainable programs.

Nevertheless, this research has limitations in scope covering only one madrasah without comparison to other institutions. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ comparative approaches among madrasah or involve quantitative methods to measure long-term impacts of IMTAQ programs on student character. Policy implications that can be drawn include the need for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to support strengthening participation-based religious programs in all madrasah. Further research also needs to explore the role of educational technology in supporting IMTAQ program sustainability. Thus, this research not only contributes to Islamic educational leadership theory development but also provides strategic direction for Islamic character education policy implementation.

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