



# Akhlaqul Banin as a Paradigm of Islamic Character Education: An Implementation Study at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Kuningan



Abdurrahman Atsa'lawi<sup>a,1,\*</sup> & Mukhlisin Mukhlisin<sup>b,2</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Universite de Zitouna Tunisia, Tunisia

<sup>b</sup>STAI Kuningan, Kuningan, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> abderrahmenechaalene@gmail.com\*; <sup>2</sup> mukhlisinelfitriyah@gmail.com

\* corresponding author

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received : 13-12-2025

Revised : 02-02-2026

Accepted : 28-02-2026

### Keywords

Akhalkulil Banin

Islamic Character

Madrasah

## ABSTRACT

Character education in Islamic educational institutions faces persistent challenges in bridging the gap between religious knowledge and its behavioral internalization among students. This study investigates Akhlaqul Banin a classical Islamic moral text by Umar bin Ahmad Baradja as a paradigm of Islamic character education and examines its implementation at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia. The study aims to analyze the conceptual framework of Akhlaqul Banin, describe its pedagogical implementation, identify supporting and constraining factors, and evaluate its outcomes on students' character development. Employing a qualitative case study design with thematic analysis and conceptual framework reconstruction, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving 28 participants over three months. Findings reveal that Akhlaqul Banin constitutes a coherent three-pillared paradigm comprising al-adab al-ruhani, al-adab al-ijtima'i, and al-adab al-ilmii. Implementation through contextual discussion, bandongan, and behavioral habituation produced a mean character assessment gain score of +0.39 across seven Islamic character indicators. The study concludes that Akhlaqul Banin, when implemented through contextually responsive pedagogy within a supportive institutional environment, serves as an effective and theoretically robust paradigm for Islamic character education in contemporary madrasah settings.

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## 1. Introduction

Character education has become one of the central concerns in educational discourse globally, including in Indonesia. In the context of Islamic education, character formation is not merely a complementary aspect of the learning process, but rather the very core of the educational mission itself. Islam places moral excellence (*akhlaq al-karimah*) as the highest goal of human development, as reflected in the Prophet Muhammad's declaration that he was sent to perfect noble character. This foundational principle has shaped the character of Islamic educational institutions throughout history, including madrasah, which serve as the primary vehicle for transmitting Islamic values in the Indonesian context.

Madrasah Aliyah, as the senior secondary level of Islamic formal education in Indonesia, occupies a strategic position in shaping the moral and spiritual character of young Muslims. Unlike general public schools, madrasah integrate religious knowledge with academic subjects, creating a distinctive educational environment that is theoretically well-suited to holistic character development. However, the reality on the ground presents a more complex picture. Various studies have documented that despite the Islamic environment of madrasah, students continue to exhibit behavioral problems such as low discipline, dishonesty, and declining respect for teachers and parents challenges that indicate a disconnect between the religious knowledge being taught and its actual internalization in daily conduct (Muhaimin, 2021; Mukhlisin Mukhlisin; Malik Sofy, 2025; Nata, 2016).

This gap between religious knowledge and behavioral practice raises a fundamental question about the effectiveness of current approaches to character education in madrasah. One of the issues frequently identified in the literature is the over-reliance on cognitive-based instruction, where religious and moral content is delivered primarily as academic material to be memorized and examined, rather than as lived values to be practiced and embodied. In this regard, the role of classical Islamic texts particularly *kitab kuning* as sources of character education deserves renewed attention, as they offer not only doctrinal content but also pedagogical frameworks grounded in centuries of Islamic scholarship.

Among the classical texts used in Islamic education in Indonesia, Akhlaqul Banin authored by Umar bin Ahmad Baradja holds a particularly prominent place. Originally written in Arabic and widely taught in pesantren and madrasah across the archipelago, this text provides a systematic and practical guide to Islamic moral conduct, covering dimensions such as the obligations of a child toward Allah, toward the Prophet, toward parents, teachers, peers, and society at large. Its language is accessible, its examples are concrete, and its moral framework is firmly rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. These characteristics make Akhlaqul Banin not merely a textbook of morality, but a comprehensive paradigm of Islamic character education that is both theologically grounded and practically applicable.

Despite its widespread use, empirical research on the implementation of Akhlaqul Banin as a formal paradigm of character education in madrasah settings remains limited. Most existing studies approach the text from a purely content-analytical perspective, examining the values contained within its pages without investigating how those values are operationalized in actual learning environments (Dewi et al., 2021; Hidayat & Syafi'i, 2022). This represents a significant research gap: we lack detailed, context-rich understanding of how the pedagogical potential of Akhlaqul Banin is realized or not realized in the daily life of madrasah institutions. Without such understanding, efforts to strengthen character education in madrasah will continue to lack an empirically grounded foundation.

The urgency of this research is further underscored by the current national educational context in Indonesia. The government's Strengthening Character Education (*Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter / PPK*) program, launched through Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017, calls for the integration of character values across all levels and types of education, including religious educational institutions. For madrasah, this policy imperative creates both an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity to reaffirm the role of classical Islamic texts like Akhlaqul Banin as indigenous, culturally rooted frameworks for character education, and a challenge to demonstrate that such frameworks can be implemented systematically and measurably within the modern institutional context of a formal madrasah (Jamhari & Asrori, 2022; Mukhlisin Mukhlisin; Malik Sofy; Deden Purbaya, 2024).

Theoretically, this study draws on the concept of character education as proposed by Thomas Lickona, who argues that effective character education must address three interconnected dimensions: moral knowing (cognitive understanding of values), moral feeling (emotional commitment to those values), and moral action (consistent behavioral enactment of those values) (Lickona, 2015). This tripartite framework maps productively onto the structure of Akhlaqul Banin, which simultaneously engages students' intellect through doctrinal explanation, their emotions through narrative exemplification, and their will through prescriptive behavioral guidance. Additionally, the study is informed by the concept of *ta'dib* as developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, which frames Islamic education not as mere transmission of knowledge (*ta'lim*) or nurturing of potentials (*tarbiyah*), but as the disciplined cultivation of *adab* a holistic moral-intellectual orientation toward Allah, fellow

humans, and the natural world (Al-Attas, 1980). Within this framework, Akhlaqul Banin can be understood as a practical instrument of ta'dib, making it theoretically significant as both a curricular resource and a pedagogical paradigm.

The present study was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 2 Kuningan, a state Islamic senior secondary school in West Java that has formally integrated the teaching of Akhlaqul Banin into its curriculum. MAN 2 Kuningan represents an instructive case study, as it is an institution that simultaneously operates within the formal state madrasah system and maintains strong pesantren influenced traditions a dual identity that creates unique conditions for the implementation of classical Islamic texts in character education.

Based on the above background, this study aims to: (1) analyze the conceptual framework of Akhlaqul Banin as a paradigm of Islamic character education; (2) describe the implementation of Akhlaqul Banin-based character education at MAN 2 Kuningan, including the methods, strategies, and learning environment employed; (3) identify the supporting factors and obstacles encountered in the implementation process; and (4) evaluate the outcomes of the implementation in terms of students' character development as observed by teachers, parents, and the students themselves.

Through a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on Islamic character education by providing empirically grounded insights into how a classical text like Akhlaqul Banin can function not merely as a subject of study, but as a living paradigm that shapes the moral culture of a madrasah institution. In doing so, it hopes to offer practical recommendations for madrasah educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers who are committed to strengthening character education in Indonesia's Islamic educational landscape.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design with thematic analysis and conceptual framework reconstruction as the core analytical strategies. This methodological combination was chosen to address two complementary objectives: documenting the lived reality of Akhlaqul Banin-based character education at MAN 2 Kuningan, and reconstructing Akhlaqul Banin as a theoretically coherent paradigm of Islamic character education. Following Yin, the case is defined as the institutional implementation of Akhlaqul Banin at MAN 2 Kuningan a bounded system encompassing curricular decisions, pedagogical practices, and the broader moral culture of the institution (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at MAN 2 Kuningan, West Java, selected purposively because the institution has formally integrated Akhlaqul Banin into its curriculum and maintains a strong pesantren-influenced educational tradition. A total of 28 participants were involved, comprising six subject teachers, two curriculum coordinators, one vice principal for student affairs, fifteen students across Grades X–XII, and four parents. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity of perspective and depth of information, with data collection continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Data were gathered through three methods to ensure triangulation. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participant categories, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participant observation was carried out over three months covering 24 classroom sessions and various school routines, with detailed field notes maintained throughout. Document analysis examined lesson plans, school character education programs, institutional regulations, and the original Arabic text of Kitab Akhlaqul Banin (Volumes I–II) by Umar bin Ahmad Baradja.

Data analysis followed a three-phase iterative process. In the first phase, all transcripts and field notes underwent open coding, generating approximately 180 discrete codes. In the second phase, codes were clustered into five major themes and fourteen sub-themes through constant comparison. In the third phase, empirical themes were interpreted through conceptual framework reconstruction, wherein the textual analysis of Akhlaqul Banin produced three reconstructed pillars: *al-adab al-ilmi* (intellectual-moral discipline), *al-adab al-ijtima'i* (social-relational ethics), and *al-adab al-ruhani*

(spiritual-devotional orientation) serving as interpretive categories for theoretical proposition development.

Trustworthiness was ensured through Lincoln and Guba's four criteria: credibility via member checking and triangulation; transferability via thick description; dependability via audit trail; and confirmability via reflexive journaling. All participants provided informed consent, data were fully anonymized, and the study received institutional ethical clearance prior to fieldwork commencement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3. Results

The findings of this study are organized around five major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of interview transcripts, observational field notes, and document analysis: (1) the conceptual structure of Akhlaq Banin as an educational paradigm; (2) instructional methods and pedagogical strategies employed by teachers; (3) institutional factors supporting implementation; (4) challenges and obstacles encountered; and (5) observable outcomes on students' Islamic character. These themes are subsequently interpreted through the reconstructed conceptual framework of Akhlaq Banin, comprising three pillars: *al-adab al-ilmī*, *al-adab al-ijtima'i*, and *al-adab al-ruhani*.

#### 3.1. The Conceptual Structure of Akhlaq Banin as an Educational Paradigm

The textual analysis of Kitab Akhlaq Banin (Volumes I–II) revealed a systematic and hierarchically organized moral curriculum that moves from foundational spiritual obligations toward increasingly complex social and relational ethics. In Volume I, the text establishes the primacy of a child's relationship with Allah and the Prophet as the bedrock of all subsequent moral conduct. Volumes II progressively address obligations toward parents, teachers, and peers, while Volume II extends the moral horizon to encompass broader social responsibilities within the Muslim community.

This hierarchical structure reflects a coherent educational philosophy that aligns closely with al-Attas's (1980) concept of *ta'dib* the disciplined cultivation of *adab* as a totalizing moral-intellectual orientation. The reconstructed conceptual framework identifies three interlocking pillars: *al-adab al-ruhani* (the spiritual foundation), *al-adab al-ijtima'i* (the relational-social dimension), and *al-adab al-ilmī* (the intellectual-moral dimension). Teachers interviewed in this study consistently affirmed this layered structure. As Teacher 3 stated, "*Kitab ini tidak hanya mengajarkan sopan santun, tapi membangun fondasi dari dalam dulu, dari hubungan anak dengan Allah, baru ke orang tua, guru, dan teman.*" This perspective confirms that Akhlaq Banin functions not as a fragmented collection of behavioral rules, but as an integrated paradigm of moral formation.

#### 3.2. Instructional Methods and Pedagogical Strategies

The implementation of Akhlaq Banin at MAN 2 Kuningan employs a diverse range of pedagogical strategies that go beyond conventional lecturing. Based on classroom observations and teacher interviews, five primary instructional methods were identified: (1) *sorogan* (individual recitation and correction), (2) *bandongan* (collective reading with teacher commentary), (3) contextual discussion (*diskusi kontekstual*), (4) moral storytelling (*kisah teladan*), and (5) behavioral habituation (*pembiasaan*) through daily school routines.

Among these, teachers reported that the combination of *bandongan* and contextual discussion was most effective in bridging the gap between textual content and students' lived experience. Teacher 1 explained, "*Setelah membaca dan menerjemahkan teks, kami selalu mengaitkan isinya dengan situasi nyata yang dialami siswa sehari-hari, misalnya bagaimana bersikap saat berbeda pendapat dengan orang tua atau guru.*" This finding resonates with Lickona's argument that effective character education must simultaneously engage moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action a tripartite engagement that the *bandongan*-discussion combination appears to facilitate naturally (Lickona, 2015).

Observational data further revealed that behavioral habituation was systematically reinforced through school-wide routines, including obligatory congregational prayers (*shalat berjamaah*), daily greetings and hand-shaking protocols with teachers (*salim*), and weekly character reflection sessions (*muhasabah*). These structured practices operationalize the values taught in Akhlaq Banin at the

level of institutional culture, consistent with what Berkowitz and Bier describe as the importance of embedding character education within the total environment of the school rather than confining it to discrete instructional sessions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2021).

### 3.3. Institutional Supporting Factors

Several institutional factors were identified as significantly supporting the effective implementation of Akhlaqul Banin at MAN 2 Kuningan. First, the strong commitment of school leadership emerged as a critical enabler. The vice principal for student affairs emphasized that character education is embedded in the school's vision statement and reflected in all institutional policies, creating a top-down normative environment that legitimizes and reinforces classroom instruction. This leadership commitment ensures that Akhlaqul Banin is not treated as a peripheral subject but as a cornerstone of the institution's educational identity.

Second, the pesantren-influenced school culture at MAN 2 Kuningan characterized by deep deference to teachers (*ta'dhim*), communal religious practices, and a pervasive ethos of moral seriousness provides a fertile institutional ground for the values promoted in Akhlaqul Banin. This cultural alignment between the text's normative framework and the school's lived environment significantly reduces the gap between instructional content and behavioral expectations, creating conditions in which moral values can be consistently modeled, practiced, and reinforced across all institutional spaces.

Third, parental support was identified as a vital reinforcing factor beyond the school walls. Three of the four parents interviewed reported actively encouraging their children to apply the values learned from the kitab at home, particularly regarding respectful communication and filial obligations. This home-school continuity is consistent with findings by Mulyasa and Pratiwi, who emphasize that sustainable character formation requires coherent moral environments across both family and institutional settings (Mulyasa & Pratiwi, 2023).

### 3.4. Challenges and Obstacles

Despite the generally supportive institutional environment, several significant challenges were identified. The most frequently cited obstacle was the limited instructional time allocated to Akhlaqul Banin within the formal curriculum typically two forty-five-minute sessions per week which teachers felt was insufficient for deep moral internalization. Teacher 5 noted, "*Dua jam pelajaran per minggu itu sangat kurang kalau kita bicara soal pembentukan karakter. Karakter itu butuh proses yang panjang dan konsisten.*"

A second challenge concerned the heterogeneity of students' prior knowledge of classical Arabic, which affected their ability to engage directly with the original text. Students with pesantren backgrounds demonstrated significantly greater fluency and engagement, while students from non-pesantren backgrounds sometimes struggled to access the text's meaning without heavy mediation from the teacher. Third, the influence of digital media and social environment outside the school was identified by both teachers and parents as a countervailing force that frequently undermined the moral values being cultivated within the institution. This challenge reflects the broader tension between formal character education and the informal moral socialization occurring in students' everyday digital lives a tension increasingly documented in the literature on Islamic education in the digital age (Hidayat & Syafi'i, 2022; Mukhlisin et al., 2023).

### 3.5. Outcomes on Students' Islamic Character

To assess the observable outcomes of Akhlaqul Banin implementation on students' character, the school administers a structured Character Assessment Instrument (Instrumen Penilaian Karakter / IPK) twice per academic year, evaluating students across seven character indicators derived from the content of Akhlaqul Banin: (1) religiosity (*religiusitas*), (2) respect for teachers (*ta'dhim kepada guru*), (3) filial piety (*birrul walidain*), (4) honesty (*kejujuran*), (5) discipline (*kedisiplinan*), (6) social responsibility (*tanggung jawab sosial*), and (7) peer respect (*menghormati sesama*). The following table presents the mean scores across these indicators for the 2023–2024 academic year, comparing the beginning of the year (Semester 1) and the end of the year (Semester 2) assessments.

**Table 1.** Mean Character Assessment Scores of MAN 2 Kuningan Students Before and After *Akhlaqul Banin* Implementation (Academic Year 2024–2025, N = 120)

Character Indicator	Semester 1 Mean	Semester 2 Mean	Gain Score	Category
Religiosity	3.42	3.81	+0.39	Good → Very Good
Respect for Teachers	3.31	3.74	+0.43	Good → Very Good
Filial Piety	3.28	3.69	+0.41	Good → Very Good
Honesty	3.15	3.52	+0.37	Good → Good
Discipline	3.09	3.48	+0.39	Good → Good
Social Responsibility	3.21	3.61	+0.40	Good → Very Good
Peer Respect	3.35	3.72	+0.37	Good → Very Good
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>+0.39</b>	<b>Good → Very Good</b>

Scale: 1.00–1.99 = Poor; 2.00–2.99 = Sufficient; 3.00–3.49 = Good; 3.50–4.00 = Very Good

The data in Table 1 reveal a consistent and meaningful improvement across all seven character indicators over the course of one academic year, with an overall mean gain score of +0.39. The most notable improvements were observed in respect for teachers (+0.43) and filial piety (+0.41), both of which correspond directly to the central moral themes of *Akhlaqul Banin* Volumes II and III. This finding suggests that the instructional emphasis placed on these particular values within the text translates into measurable behavioral outcomes at the institutional level. Conversely, the indicators of honesty and discipline showed the smallest gains (+0.37), consistent with teachers' observations that these dimensions of character are more heavily influenced by factors outside the school's direct control, including family environment and peer culture.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this study carry significant theoretical and practical implications for the field of Islamic character education in Indonesia. At the theoretical level, the reconstructed conceptual framework of *Akhlaqul Banin* organized around the three pillars of *al-adab al-ruhani*, *al-adab al-ijtima'i*, and *al-adab al-ilmi* offers a distinctively Islamic alternative to Western character education models that have dominated the discourse in Indonesian educational policy. While frameworks such as Lickona's (1991) tripartite model provide valuable analytical tools, they are grounded in a secular liberal tradition that does not fully capture the theological dimension of Islamic moral formation. The present study demonstrates that *Akhlaqul Banin* embeds character education within a comprehensive cosmological framework in which all moral conduct is understood as an expression of one's covenant (*mithaq*) with Allah a dimension that is entirely absent from secular character education theory.

This finding aligns with and extends the arguments advanced by Rohman and Ningsih, who contend that the revitalization of classical Islamic texts in contemporary madrasah education represents not a nostalgic retreat from modernity, but a principled assertion of Islamic epistemological sovereignty in the face of globally dominant secular educational paradigms (Mukhlisin & Sofy, 2025; Rohman & Ningsih, 2021). Similarly, Anwar and Fauzi have argued that kitab kuning-based pedagogy offers a form of indigenous knowledge in Islamic education that has been systematically undervalued in mainstream curriculum development discourse, despite its demonstrable effectiveness in moral formation. The present study provides empirical support for both of these positions (Anwar & Fauzi, 2022).

At the practical level, the findings highlight the critical importance of pedagogical method in determining whether the values contained in *Akhlaqul Banin* are successfully internalized by students. The data suggest that passive transmission through rote memorization and translation alone is insufficient; effective implementation requires active engagement strategies particularly contextual discussion and behavioral habituation that connect textual content to students' lived moral experience.

This finding is consistent with Mulyasa and Pratiwi, who emphasize that character education in Indonesian madrasah must evolve from a knowledge-transmission model toward an experiential, practice-based approach if it is to produce lasting behavioral change (Mukhlisin et al., 2024; Mulyasa & Pratiwi, 2023).

The challenge of digital media influence identified in this study also merits serious attention. Several studies in recent years have documented the ways in which social media platforms undermine the moral values cultivated in Islamic educational settings, particularly among adolescents (Fadhillah et al., 2023). The findings of this study suggest that madrasah need to develop more proactive strategies for addressing the moral dimensions of students' digital lives, potentially by incorporating digital ethics (*adab digital*) as an explicit extension of the Akhlaqul Banin curriculum an integration that would be both theoretically coherent and practically responsive to contemporary challenges.

Finally, the quantitative character assessment data presented in Table 1, while encouraging, must be interpreted with appropriate caution. The gain scores observed represent institutional-level averages that mask significant individual variation, and the assessment instrument itself while systematically applied relies primarily on teacher observation rather than multi-source behavioral measurement. Future research would benefit from the development of more robust, multi-informant assessment tools that can capture the subtler and longer-term dimensions of character development that Akhlaqul Banin aims to cultivate. Notwithstanding these limitations, the consistency of improvement across all seven character indicators provides meaningful evidence that Akhlaqul Banin, when implemented through a diverse and contextually sensitive pedagogical approach, can serve as an effective and theoretically grounded paradigm of Islamic character education in the contemporary madrasah context.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Akhlaqul Banin functions not merely as a classical moral textbook, but as a comprehensive paradigm of Islamic character education whose conceptual architecture organized around the three pillars of al-adab al-ruhani, al-adab al-ijtima'i, and al-adab al-ilmi offers a theologically grounded and pedagogically coherent framework for character formation in the contemporary madrasah context. The implementation at MAN 2 Kuningan reveals that when the text is delivered through diverse, contextually sensitive pedagogical strategies particularly the combination of bandongan, contextual discussion, and behavioral habituation it produces measurable improvements across key character indicators, with an overall mean gain score of +0.39 over one academic year.

The study further identifies that institutional leadership commitment, pesantren-influenced school culture, and parental engagement are critical enablers of effective implementation, while limited instructional time, heterogeneous Arabic literacy levels, and digital media influence represent persistent challenges requiring strategic responses. Theoretically, this study contributes a reconstructed conceptual framework of Akhlaqul Banin that enriches existing Islamic character education discourse beyond Western-derived models. Future research is encouraged to examine the long-term behavioral impact of Akhlaqul Banin-based education across multiple institutional contexts using more robust, multi-informant assessment instruments.

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