CHARACTER COACHING TRANSFORMATION IN TRANSITION: A CASE STUDY AT PONDOK PESANTREN DARUL MUKHLISIN, PADANG LAMPE

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ABSTRACT

Character building is a fundamental aspect of education, particularly within Islamic boarding schools. Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe, as a long-standing Islamic educational institution, has undergone significant transformations in its approach to character education over time. This study aims to describe and critically analyze the transformation processes in character building at the pesantren, especially during the transition from the pandemic phase to the post-pandemic normal phase. This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were collected through interviews with key stakeholders at the Islamic boarding school and through documentation analysis involving institutional archives and the curriculum. The data were analyzed descriptively using qualitative methods, supported by triangulation techniques to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The results reveal that the Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School underwent several notable phases in character education. During the early pandemic phase, character building was conducted entirely online over a 30-day period. In the subsequent transition phase, the school adopted a hybrid model—15 days online and 15 days offline. Eventually, as conditions stabilized, the institution returned to a fully offline model, implementing a more flexible and integrative one-month program. Character building has also been formally recognized as a graduation requirement for UMI students, carrying six academic credits. The school continues to adapt its programs to remain relevant to contemporary educational demands. Several key factors have driven this transformation: (1) the increasingly complex dynamics of modern life, (2) rising societal expectations for educational quality, and (3) the pesantren's growing awareness of the need to adapt to change. These changes are reflected in the revised curriculum, updated pedagogical methods, and enhanced extracurricular offerings. This study contributes to the discourse on Islamic education, particularly in the domain of character formation. The findings offer valuable insights for other Islamic educational institutions aiming to improve character education in line with evolving societal and technological contexts.

Moreover, the study provides important considerations for policymakers in designing educational frameworks that respond to the needs of the digital era.

Keywords: Character building; School transformation; Islamic boarding school

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in realizing the goals of national education. These institutions are tasked with developing students' potential to become scholars who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, uphold noble morals, possess a strong sense of responsibility, and demonstrate attributes such as health, creativity, independence, and democratic citizenship. As the highest level within the educational system, higher education builds upon competencies acquired at previous stages, particularly in spiritual and social domains. Consequently, the higher the level of education, the more advanced and comprehensive the competencies to be developed—especially in terms of character formation. According to Lickona, as cited in Muchlas Samani, character development encompasses three essential dimensions: (1) the spiritual dimension, (2) the physical dimension, which includes strength, agility, and sensory function, and (3) the psychological dimension, which consists of intellectual ability, creativity, emotion, social skills, and attitude. Character education, therefore, is oriented toward nurturing a strong, ethical human soul. It seeks to develop students' potential by integrating values of piety and moral virtue. At its core, character education functions as a "workshop of the soul," a transformative space to internalize knowledge and life experiences while rejecting deviant or harmful behavior, all guided by universal moral and humanitarian standards.

In Islamic tradition, Al-Ghazali proposes a staged approach to character development through the At-Tadrij (gradual) method to replace undesirable behavior (akhlaq al-radzilah) with commendable traits. This approach includes three sequential stages: (1) Mujahadah – a sincere and persistent effort to eliminate despicable characteristics; (2) Riyadah – systematic cultivation of virtuous character through training and discipline; and (3) Muraqabah – constant self-awareness and the belief in being under the supervision of Allah SWT, thereby encouraging emulation of divine attributes. Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI) implements character education through its flagship program, Qalbu Enlightenment, which serves as the foundation for students' moral and ethical development. This model is rooted in the conceptual framework of character development and aligns with Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 1, Paragraph 19. The law defines curriculum as a structured set of plans and arrangements concerning educational objectives, content, learning materials, and instructional methods, designed to guide the implementation of learning to achieve educational goals. UMI's character education curriculum is conceptually designed and implemented at the Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe, Pangkep. The program consists of four integral components: (1) objective components that define the desired outcomes of character education; (2) content components that include moral and spiritual values; (3) method components, emphasizing experiential and reflective learning; and (4) evaluation components, designed to measure character growth and behavioral transformation.

Education in Indonesia has experienced considerable disruption during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has lasted for more than two years. One of the most critical impacts has been a notable decline in the quality of education at all levels. In response to these increasingly complex national challenges, Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI) has made concerted efforts to innovate, particularly in the area of character development. One such innovation is the continuation and transformation of character-building programs at the Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe, which has become a flagship program at UMI. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, UMI sought to ensure the sustainability of this program. During the early stages of the pandemic, the character development process at the boarding school was conducted entirely online, with virtual meetings replacing in-person interaction. This shift created significant challenges, particularly for lecturers and educators, who found it difficult to monitor and guide students effectively. Educators were expected to be more proactive, creative, and innovative in delivering learning and character-building activities. Another notable consequence was the loss of direct interpersonal interaction and the absence of a conducive learning environment typically experienced through face-to-face engagement at the boarding school.

As the pandemic gradually subsided, UMI introduced a hybrid learning system that integrated both online and offline methods to revitalize the character development process. This approach enabled the program to regain its interactive and immersive qualities while maintaining flexibility in delivery. Observing this phenomenon, the researcher is interested in exploring the curriculum design of the student character development program implemented at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School. Furthermore, the study seeks to investigate the transformation process of character development during the transition period – from the pandemic phase to the post-pandemic (normal) phase. The researcher hopes that this study will serve as a model or pilot framework for other higher education institutions, many of which have struggled to maintain such programs effectively during the pandemic. Therefore, based on the issues outlined above, the researcher will conduct an in-depth investigation through a dissertation entitled: "Transformation of Character Coaching During the Transition Period: A Case Study at the Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe."

2. METHODS

This study was qualitative in nature and was conducted at the Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe, Pangkep Regency. The primary aim of the research was to understand the transformation of character coaching during the transitional period from the COVID-19 pandemic phase to the post-pandemic or normal phase. In accordance with the qualitative paradigm, the data collected were in the form of words, narratives, and visual observations rather than numerical data. A case study design was employed to investigate a specific phenomenon in depth, enabling a comprehensive and contextualized understanding. The research site, Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School, was managed by the Waqf Foundation of Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI) Makassar. The study adopted a multidisciplinary approach – pedagogical, psychological, and sociological – to analyze the transformation in character development within the institution.

The data sources included both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were obtained directly from key stakeholders such as educators, students, and administrators involved in the character coaching process. Secondary data consisted of institutional documents, curricula, reports, and other relevant archival records. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The researcher acted as the main instrument of the study, maintaining reflexivity and sensitivity throughout the data-gathering process. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences and perspectives, while observations were conducted during both formal learning sessions and informal interactions to capture authentic educational dynamics.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which consisted of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The collected data were coded and categorized into themes, which allowed patterns, connections, and key insights to emerge. An inductive approach was used to derive general conclusions from specific field-based data. To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the study employed multiple verification strategies, including data triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the field. Triangulation enabled cross-validation of data from different sources and methods, while member checks were used to verify the accuracy of interpretations with the participants involved. This qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate for capturing the complex and nuanced process of character coaching transformation within the pesantren setting during a period of major societal and educational change.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Coaching Curriculum at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School, Padang Lampe

The character development process for students at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), conducted at the Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe, is part of a structured Qalbu Enlightenment course designed to complement and enrich the academic experience on campus. This program offers more than just cognitive instruction; it integrates moral and spiritual elements to form a comprehensive and holistic approach to character coaching. The educational content is framed around the development of three key intelligences – intellectual, moral, and spiritual – which are delivered through synergistic strategies. While intellectual intelligence is primarily nurtured through academic instruction on the UMI campus, the cultivation of moral and spiritual intelligence takes place in the immersive environment of the Darul Mukhlisin boarding school.

Unlike conventional pesantren, Darul Mukhlisin does not conduct open recruitment. Instead, the boarding school is specifically designated for UMI students who are required to undertake this program as part of their curriculum. As such, the character education curriculum aligns directly with UMI's institutional policies and academic framework, given that the school operates under the supervision of the UMI Waqf Foundation. The curriculum is formalized through a Semester Learning Plan (RPS), ensuring a structured and academically recognized framework for implementation. The content of the character development curriculum includes

core subjects such as aqidah (faith development), sharia (Islamic law), and akhlaq (moral and ethical values). These core areas are designed to be interconnected, reinforcing one another to promote a deeply rooted spiritual and ethical foundation. To further support these subjects, the program incorporates thematic Qur'anic interpretation, worship practicums, and Qur'an memorization and recitation, bringing the total academic load of the program to six credit hours.

Character coaching activities are delivered through a variety of learning settings. Intracurricular activities occur in formal classroom environments and are centered on delivering structured lessons. Co-curricular activities offer opportunities for deeper reflection and reinforcement of the concepts taught, typically through group discussions or individual assignments. Extracurricular activities are designed to support student creativity, leadership, and personal development in less formal learning environments. The effectiveness of this character education program is evaluated using multiple approaches to ensure that its objectives are met. Formal assessments are conducted at the end of the coaching program, supplemented by practical evaluations in the boarding school and follow-up assessments upon students' return to the university. This layered approach allows for a holistic assessment of character growth and knowledge acquisition. Overall, the character education model employed at Darul Mukhlisin represents a forward-thinking and contextually grounded initiative. It effectively integrates intellectual, moral, and spiritual training in a way that not only complements academic education but also prepares students to become ethically responsible, intellectually capable, and spiritually mature individuals ready to navigate the complexities of modern life.

Transformation of Character Coaching During the Transitional Period at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School, Padang Lampe

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge to all sectors of life, including education. In Indonesia, government-mandated measures such as Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar (PSBB), Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat (PPKM), and the implementation of health protocols in the new normal era significantly disrupted conventional teaching and learning practices. These changes demanded educational institutions – especially those grounded in character formation such as Islamic boarding schools – to rethink and transform their pedagogical models to ensure the continuity and relevance of their character-building programs. The Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School in Padang Lampe, under the auspices of the Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI), responded to this crisis by initiating a phased transformation of its character education framework, ensuring that the core values of moral, spiritual, and intellectual development remained intact despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

Pre-Pandemic Character Coaching (Conventional Face-to-Face Model)

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the character coaching program for UMI students was conducted fully offline over a 30-day period. Students were sent to the boarding school in Padang Lampe, where they underwent intensive and immersive training in moral and spiritual development through direct instruction, collective worship, and interactive discussions. The program combined elements of qalbu (heart) enlightenment—focusing on aqidah (faith), sharia (Islamic law), and akhlaq (morality)—with practical exercises such as daily worship routines,

community service, and peer mentoring. This conventional model allowed for strong interpersonal interaction between students and educators and fostered an experiential learning environment conducive to character formation.

Pandemic-Era Transformation: Fully Online Model

The outbreak of COVID-19 necessitated an abrupt halt to physical gatherings, forcing institutions like UMI to adopt remote learning strategies. Despite the difficulties, Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School swiftly implemented a fully online character coaching program. For 30 days, students participated in virtual sessions via platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, and WhatsApp. The main modules – aqidah, sharia, and akhlaq – were delivered through live video conferences, supplemented by recorded lectures, digital learning materials, and group chats. Practical worship components, which were traditionally performed in communal settings, were now conducted individually at home. Students submitted photos or video evidence to verify participation. In spiritual sessions such as dzikr, wirid, and tadarrus (Qur'an recitation), participation was tracked via online attendance tools and class guardians played a crucial role in mentoring students, monitoring their engagement, and encouraging consistency. Educators were expected not only to be content deliverers but also to act as motivators, IT facilitators, and emotional supporters – a multidimensional role that required considerable adaptability and creativity. This transition, while effective in maintaining continuity, was not without its challenges. Many students struggled with internet connectivity issues, lack of conducive learning environments at home, and difficulties maintaining self-discipline without physical supervision. Educators, likewise, faced limitations in assessing affective outcomes and fostering meaningful spiritual experiences through digital platforms.

Post-Pandemic / New Normal Phase: Hybrid Model of Coaching

As restrictions eased and Indonesia entered the new normal phase, Darul Mukhlisin implemented a hybrid learning model to balance safety with effectiveness. The program was redesigned to include 15 days of online instruction and 15 days of offline residency at the boarding school. This model retained the flexibility and accessibility of digital platforms while reintroducing the depth and authenticity of face-to-face interaction. In the hybrid system, the first half of the program was conducted online, focusing on theoretical and reflective learning. Students engaged with instructors through video lectures, discussion forums, and individual assignments related to *aqidah, sharia,* and akhlaq. The remaining 15 days were spent on-site at the boarding school, emphasizing practical applications such as congregational prayers, group reflections, communal living, and direct mentorship. This transitional model not only smoothed the reintegration of students into physical learning spaces but also allowed educators to evaluate which elements of digital learning could be retained or blended for future use. It highlighted the importance of flexibility in curriculum design, the need for digital competence among educators, and the value of student-centered approaches in character education. The hybrid model has proven to be a valuable innovation in UMI's character coaching framework. It not only mitigated the disruptions caused by the pandemic but also offered a more resilient and adaptable model for future character-building initiatives. The experience revealed that character education does not have to be limited to physical settings; rather, with the right pedagogical strategies, digital and hybrid modalities can also be meaningful and transformative.

Furthermore, this transformation underscored several key insights. First, character development in higher education must go beyond cognitive instruction; it must also nurture students' spiritual and moral selves in a structured and holistic way. Second, institutions must be ready to evolve their methodologies to remain effective under different circumstances. Third, student engagement and educator innovation are critical factors in the success of any character-building initiative, regardless of the delivery mode. In conclusion, the transformation of the character coaching program at Darul Mukhlisin Islamic Boarding School reflects the broader adaptive capacity of Islamic education in Indonesia. The shift from conventional to digital, and eventually hybrid, models of character coaching illustrate how tradition and modernity can be integrated to produce resilient, morally upright, and spiritually aware graduates. This transformation serves as a potential model for other universities and Islamic institutions navigating similar challenges in the post-pandemic educational landscape.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore and understand the core problems and challenges faced by Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI) in the implementation of character coaching during the transitional phases brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly as it shifted toward the new normal. The research findings uncovered a range of emerging challenges that UMI and its affiliated Islamic boarding school, Pondok Pesantren Darul Mukhlisin Padang Lampe, had to navigate in order to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of character development programs. These challenges were closely linked to broader shifts in the national and global education landscape that required a more innovative, adaptive, and resilient approach to student development.

One of the main challenges identified was the pressure on UMI to continuously innovate in response to the changing dynamics of education. The pandemic not only disrupted traditional pedagogical models but also accelerated the need for digital integration in teaching and character coaching. As a result, UMI had to reconsider its delivery models, educational technologies, and curriculum content to ensure that character education remained relevant, engaging, and impactful despite physical distancing measures and online learning constraints. In addition, the Islamic boarding school Darul Mukhlisin in Padang Lampe was faced with the necessity of curriculum reform. It had to continuously update its character coaching curriculum to remain aligned with technological advancements and societal needs, while also maintaining the core Islamic values and spiritual dimensions that are central to pesantren-based education. This required the school to not only revise its instructional content but also to retrain its educators and develop flexible learning models that could accommodate the different learning environments imposed by the pandemic and its aftermath.

The transformation of the character coaching process at Darul Mukhlisin can be categorized into three distinct transitional phases. The first was the early pandemic phase, where character development activities were abruptly shifted to fully online formats. This posed significant difficulties, particularly in maintaining meaningful spiritual engagement, moral mentorship, and student discipline – elements that are traditionally cultivated through face-to-face interactions in a boarding school setting. The second phase, known as the new normal or

transitional phase, introduced a hybrid learning model. In this phase, character coaching was divided equally between online and offline formats, typically 15 days each. This model aimed to balance health protocols with the need for in-person spiritual and moral development, enabling students to gradually readjust to physical interaction while still benefiting from digital resources. Finally, the third phase – the return to the normal period – saw a full resumption of offline character coaching programs. This phase not only marked a return to the traditional pedagogical environment but also reflected significant pedagogical evolution, incorporating lessons learned during the pandemic. The curriculum was enhanced, more integrative, and better aligned with the demands of the digital era while still rooted in the Islamic moral and spiritual tradition.

In conclusion, the character coaching transformation at UMI's Islamic boarding school during these transitional phases illustrates a proactive and responsive approach to educational challenges. UMI's efforts to preserve the integrity and continuity of its character education program, while simultaneously embracing innovation, serve as a valuable model for other higher education institutions facing similar disruptions. The experience highlights the importance of educational flexibility, curriculum adaptability, and institutional readiness in sustaining the moral and intellectual development of students during times of crisis and beyond.

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