

Integrating Kitab Kuning Studies into the Local Content Curriculum to Foster Islamic Character among Students at MTs Abadiyah Gabus

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Abstract: Strengthening students' Islamic character has become a major concern in contemporary Islamic education due to increasing moral degradation, declining religious values, and the challenges posed by globalization and digitalization. One promising approach is the integration of Kitab Kuning studies into the formal madrasah curriculum as local content. However, empirical studies examining how Kitab Kuning contributes to Islamic character formation within formal educational settings remain limited. This study aimed to analyze the implementation of Kitab Kuning studies as local content and examine its contribution to the development of students' Islamic character at MTs Abadiyah Gabus. A descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while trustworthiness was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that Kitab Kuning studies are systematically integrated into the local curriculum and aligned with Islamic Religious Education subjects through the use of classical texts such as Tafsir Jalalain, Bulughul Maram, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim, and Matan al-Taqrīb. This integration strengthens students' faith, discipline, responsibility, respect for teachers, honesty, and moral conduct through instructional activities, teacher role modeling, and the internalization of Islamic values in daily school life. The study contributes a practical model for integrating pesantren-based learning traditions into formal madrasah curricula, offering a contextual framework for strengthening Islamic character education and enriching the development of locally relevant curriculum innovation in Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: Islamic Character Education; Local Curriculum; Pesantren-Based Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a process aimed at guiding young individuals toward maturity, namely the ability to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and shape attitudinal changes (Darda et al., 2025). In the school environment, education does not solely focus on mastering academic aspects but must also be accompanied by character formation (Anwar & Subhan, 2021). Education plays a crucial role as the primary means of shaping the character and personality of the younger generation (Sari et al., 2024). The formation of noble morals (*akhlaq al-karimah*) is a top priority, as exemplified by the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who was sent to perfect human morality. Therefore, education becomes a vital aspect of human life, as it functions as an effort to liberate individuals from ignorance, adversity, and backwardness in the era of globalization.

Although character education has become one of the primary focuses of national education (Heni Kurniasih et al., 2016), various indicators suggest that moral and religious challenges among students remain a serious concern. The 2024 Education Integrity Assessment Survey (Survei Penilaian Integritas Pendidikan/SPI) conducted by the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) revealed a decline in Indonesia's educational integrity index from 73.7 in 2023 to 69.5 in 2024 (Kpk.go.id, 2025). The survey also found that approximately 45% of students admitted to having engaged in cheating practices, indicating that issues of academic integrity remain prevalent within educational institutions.

Along with the rapid development of time and progress, particularly in the field of education, the role of the curriculum has become increasingly important as a key determinant of educational success (Naim, 2022). The curriculum plays a strategic role in realizing educational goals, including character development. An adaptive and contextual curriculum is capable of addressing students' needs while responding to contemporary challenges (Dewi Prasari Suryawati, 2016). One relevant form of curriculum development is the implementation of local content (*muatan lokal*) tailored to the characteristics and needs of the educational environment (Aida Ratna Zulaiha).

Local content emphasizes the teaching of classical Islamic texts (*kutub al-muqaddimah*) as a foundation for moral development. One of the commonly used references is ethical texts that contain Islamic moral values aimed at shaping students' character (Solihin et al., 2020). The local content curriculum is believed to provide a deep understanding of Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the perspectives of classical scholars (Zakariya, 2016). Local content allows educational institutions to integrate local wisdom values and institutional excellence into the learning process. It is often directed toward strengthening Islamic studies, one of which is through kitab kuning learning as an intellectual legacy of classical Islamic scholars (Purwanti, 2024).

Kitab kuning holds an important position in the Islamic scholarly tradition, as it contains teachings on creed (*aqidah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and manners (*adab*) derived from the Qur'an and Hadith (Ramadhan, 2024). Through the study of kitab kuning, students not only gain religious

understanding but also deeply internalize Islamic character values (Wahidah, 2020). However, several studies indicate that students' interest in kitab kuning learning tends to decline, particularly in formal educational institutions (Suriani et al., 2025). Linguistic complexity and less adaptive teaching methods often become obstacles to the effectiveness of kitab kuning studies in schools (Kartini et al., 2026).

In contrast to this tendency, MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati implements kitab kuning studies as local content in a systematic manner and integrates them with the national curriculum. Learning activities are designed using a contextual approach and religious habituation to strengthen students' character. The implementation of kitab kuning studies at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati is not only oriented toward mastery of religious material but also toward the formation of students' religious character through the habituation of worship, discipline, responsibility, and respectful attitudes toward teachers. This indicates that kitab kuning studies have significant potential as an instrument for character education in madrasahs.

Previous research by Irsyad Zafir Ramadhan (2024) demonstrates that kitab kuning learning programs effectively strengthen students' religious character. Similarly, Sholeh study shows that curriculum development assistance in local content (kitab kuning mastery) successfully improves students' competence in studying kitab kuning (Sholeh, 2018). Syaifulloh Yusuf also explains that systematic kitab kuning studies are effective in shaping students' religious character, particularly in aspects of learning ethics and morality (Yusuf & Imawan, 2021).

However, existing studies have predominantly focused on learning outcomes, curriculum assistance models, or the effectiveness of Kitab Kuning learning in pesantren settings. Studies that specifically examine how Kitab Kuning learning is institutionalized as local content within formal madrasah curricula and its contribution to the development of students' Islamic character remain very limited. Furthermore, research investigating the integration of pesantren-based learning traditions into formal madrasah education within the context of contemporary curriculum development is still scarce. This condition indicates a research gap that warrants further investigation.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on examining the implementation of Kitab Kuning studies as formal local content in madrasahs and their contribution to Islamic character education. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize learning outcomes or instructional effectiveness, this research explores how the curriculum is designed, implemented, and integrated into the process of students' character formation. Through a case study at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati, this study is expected to contribute to the development of scholarship on curriculum integration, Islamic character education, and the preservation of pesantren intellectual traditions within the formal Islamic education system.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Kitab Kuning studies as local content and examine their contribution to the formation of students' Islamic character at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati. The

findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the literature on Islamic character education and curriculum integration, as well as practical contributions to the development of local content curricula in Islamic educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. Descriptive qualitative research collects data in the form of words or images rather than numerical data, aiming to describe research findings and explore phenomena in depth (Sugiyono, 2020). This approach provides an accurate description and explanation of the conditions or phenomena under investigation. The selection of this approach was based on the study's objective, namely to explore and understand the implementation of *kitab kuning* studies as a local content subject and its contribution to the formation of students' Islamic character.

The study was conducted at MTs Abadiyah Gabus, Pati Regency, Central Java. This institution was purposively selected because it is one of the madrasahs that has formally integrated kitab kuning studies into its local content curriculum, making it a relevant setting for examining the implementation process of the program and its educational implications. The research participants consisted of eight informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the implementation of the program. The informants included the principal (one person), the vice principal for curriculum affairs (one person), teachers responsible for kitab kuning instruction (two persons), and students participating in the program (four persons). These informants were selected because they possessed relevant knowledge and experience regarding the planning, implementation, and outcomes of kitab kuning studies at the madrasah (Wiwaha & Ramdani, 2024).

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation (Sawitri, 2025). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all eight informants to obtain in-depth information regarding the objectives, implementation process, challenges, and perceived impacts of the kitab kuning study program. Observations were carried out directly during kitab kuning learning activities to examine classroom interactions, teaching methods, student participation, and the learning environment. Documentation data included lesson plans, syllabi, school regulations, curriculum documents, activity reports, photographs, and various institutional records related to the implementation of kitab kuning studies. Secondary data were obtained from books, scholarly journals, and other relevant literature related to the research topic (Supriandi, 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (Matthew B. Miles, 1994), which consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts, observation notes, and research documents were coded and categorized based on emerging

themes related to curriculum implementation, learning processes, and character formation. The categorized data were then organized and presented systematically to facilitate interpretation. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure consistency between the findings and the empirical evidence obtained in the field (Qomaruddin & Halimah Sa'diyah, 2024).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, data triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation (Ilhami et al., 2014). Source triangulation was also conducted through cross-checking information among the principal, teachers, and students. Furthermore, prolonged engagement in the field and systematic documentation of the entire research process were undertaken to strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Kitab Kuning Studies as Local Content in the Formation of Students Islamic Character

The implementation of *Kitab Kuning* studies at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati functions not only as a local content subject but also as a character-building mechanism integrated into the culture of the madrasah. Based on interviews with the school leadership, the program has been maintained since the establishment of the institution because it is considered an effective means of transmitting Islamic values while preserving the intellectual tradition of the pesantren. The learning process observed at MTs Abadiyah Gabus reflects this integration. Students first acquire moral knowledge from classical Islamic texts, then develop an emotional attachment to these values through teachers' guidance and religious activities, and ultimately practice them in their daily routines both within the madrasah and the pesantren environment.

Based on interviews with the school leadership, the program has been maintained since the establishment of the institution because it is considered an effective means of transmitting Islamic values while preserving the intellectual tradition of the pesantren. As stated by the principal: "The study of Kitab Kuning has become a distinctive characteristic of our madrasah. It is not only intended to teach students how to read classical Islamic texts but also to instill noble character, discipline, and religious values that can be practiced in their daily lives".

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Bahrudin, which found that Kitab Kuning learning is not merely oriented toward the acquisition of religious knowledge but also serves as a medium for developing students' religious character through moral education, behavioral habituation, and the internalization of Islamic values in daily life (Bahrudin & Rifa'i, 2021). The study further emphasized that the values contained in Kitab Kuning can be transformed into actual behavior through a continuous learning process supported by a religious educational environment. Similarly, in the implementation of Kitab Kuning studies at MTs Abadiyah Gabus, students are

not only trained to understand Arabic texts but are also encouraged to practice the moral values contained in the books through their daily behavior and various religious habituation activities. The implementation of kitab kuning studies at MTs Abadiyah Gabus aligns with the stages of implementation proposed by Zamakhsyari Dhofier, which consist of three main stages.

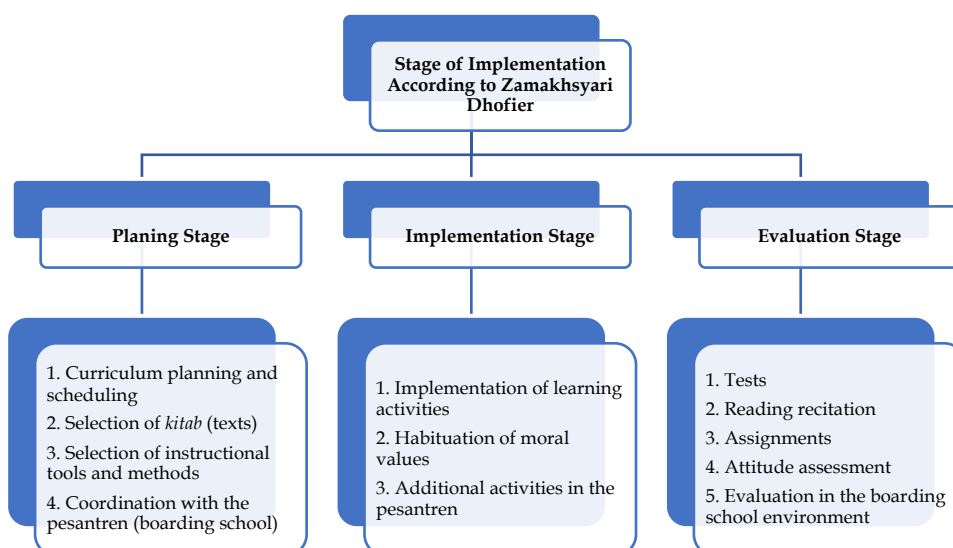


Figure 1. Stages of Implementation According to Zamakhsyari Dhofier

The implementation of kitab kuning studies as local content at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati is carried out through integrated stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation, all of which are oriented toward the formation of students' Islamic character (Sadaruddin et al., 2025). These three stages indicate that kitab kuning learning is not positioned merely as an additional activity but as a strategic component of the madrasah's educational system.

During the planning stage, the madrasah designs the local content curriculum contextually by considering students' characteristics, pesantren traditions, and moral development objectives. Scheduling the lessons during the first and second periods reflects pedagogical awareness that kitab kuning learning requires high levels of concentration and students' mental readiness. The selection of texts is adjusted to students' Arabic language proficiency and the moral values to be instilled, ensuring that the learning process proceeds gradually (*tadarruj*) (Muhammad Syu'aib, 2025). This planning pattern is consistent with the perspectives of Dhofier and KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, who emphasize the importance of aligning learning materials, methods, and students' capacities in Islamic education (Dhofier, 2009).

Furthermore, the preparation of instructional instruments, including syllabi, lesson plans, teaching methods, and evaluation tools, demonstrates that kitab kuning studies have been managed systematically and professionally. This finding is supported by research conducted by (Fathurrochman et al., 2021), which found that the successful integration of Islamic values into the curriculum requires systematic planning, contextual learning materials, and alignment between educational objectives and students' developmental needs. The

integration of the pesantren environment at the preparation stage also strengthens learning continuity, as students receive habituation and guidance beyond formal madrasah hours (Yusuf, 2021).

At the implementation stage, kitab kuning learning is conducted through the bandongan and sorogan methods, which are distinctive features of the pesantren tradition. These methods allow for intensive interaction between teachers and students, enabling teachers to directly monitor students' reading abilities, textual comprehension, and attitudes during the learning process (Jannah et al., 2025). The explanation of lexical meanings, legal content, and moral values within the texts ensures that learning is not merely linguistic but also normative and ethical. Supporting activities in the pesantren, such as evening religious gatherings, muroja'ah (revision), and independent reading exercises, expand students' learning spaces and create continuity between classroom instruction and daily life. As stated by Dhofier, the success of kitab kuning education is highly dependent on the intensity of interaction, teachers' role modeling, and a supportive environment (Dhofier, 2009). A religious and well-controlled boarding environment accelerates the internalization of character values through the habituation of discipline, obedience in worship, and proper conduct in social interactions (Desfita et al., 2023).

At the evaluation stage, assessment is conducted comprehensively and continuously through daily, weekly, and semester-based evaluations. The evaluation does not merely measure cognitive aspects such as students' ability to read and comprehend kitab kuning texts, but also assesses attitudes, discipline, and character development (Arif et al., 2025). Additional evaluations conducted in the boarding environment enrich the assessment data by reflecting students' behavior in real-life contexts. This evaluation model indicates that kitab kuning learning at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati emphasizes a balance between intellectual competence and moral formation, which is characteristic of evaluation practices in the pesantren tradition. This finding supports the argument of Darling-Hammond (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), who emphasize that effective educational assessment should evaluate not only academic achievement but also students' social, moral, and behavioral development through authentic assessment approaches.

The sustainability of the kitab kuning study program is supported by institutional synergy among the school principal, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, and subject teachers. The principal plays a role in policy formulation and supervision (Berliani et al., 2023), the vice principal for curriculum manages technical and administrative aspects, while teachers serve as the primary actors in the internalization of values through direct instruction (Jamaludin, 2021). This collaboration creates a learning system that is not only administratively well-organized but also pedagogically effective (M Karim et al., 2024). As supported by the research of Irsyad Zafir Ramadhan and Muhammad Abdul Manam, kitab kuning learning is effective when accompanied by comprehensive evaluation and oriented toward character formation (Irsyad, 2024).

In *Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari emphasizes that educational success is highly dependent on three main pillars: purity of the heart, proper conduct (*adab*), and *mujahadah* (earnest striving) in the pursuit of knowledge. Broadly speaking, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (Al-Mikraj, 2024) outlines four essential steps in character formation.

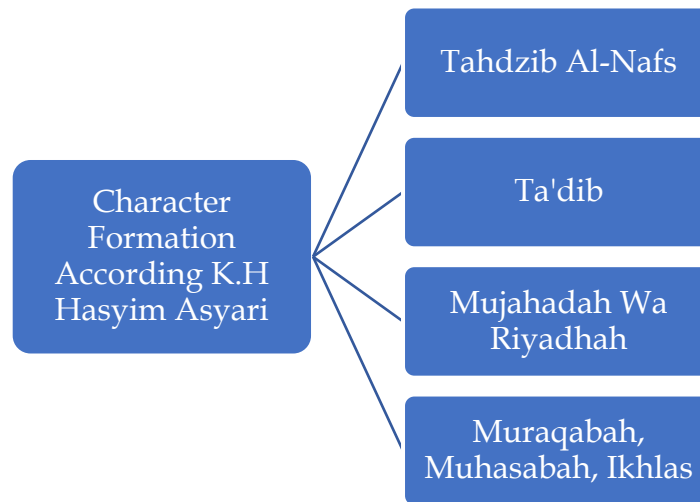


Figure 2. Character Formation According to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari

Character formation according to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari begins with *tahdzib al-nafs*, namely the cultivation of the soul to purify it from reprehensible traits such as arrogance and laziness. The heart is viewed as the center of morality; when the heart is pure, behavior will be virtuous (Nurbaedi, 2018). At this stage, character formation is carried out through spiritual development, the rectification of learning intentions, and guidance from teachers as spiritual mentors (Haerudin, 2025). The next stage is *ta'dib*, which refers to the formation of proper conduct through the habituation of noble morals such as honesty, humility (*tawadhu'*), discipline, and respect for teachers. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari emphasized that proper conduct precedes knowledge and can only be developed through continuous practice and exemplary role modeling by teachers (Mahfudoh et al., 2026). Therefore, the educational environment must support a religious culture and the daily habituation of ethical behavior (Nurizah & Amrullah, 2024).

Furthermore, character formation is strengthened through *mujahadah wa riyadhah*, namely earnest striving and consistent self-discipline. Strong character emerges from disciplined worship, self-control, responsibility in learning, and active involvement in social activities. Continuous habituation gradually instills moral values deeply within students (Jahro et al., 2025).

The final stage involves *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and *ikhlas*, which refer to awareness of divine supervision, self-reflection, and sincerity in actions. At this stage, students are guided to evaluate their behavior, correct mistakes, and internalize moral values inwardly. Teachers play a crucial role in providing moral evaluation and spiritual reinforcement so that character formation is not

merely outward in nature but deeply rooted in the heart (Supriyanto & , Zuhri, 2026). As explained by Faturrahman (2023), effective learning of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* significantly contributes to shaping students' religious character.

Contribution of *Kitab Kuning* Studies as Local Content to the Formation of Students' Religious Character

Kitab Kuning constitutes classical Islamic literature encompassing teachings on jurisprudence (*fiqh*), ethics (*akhlak*), Sufism (*tasawuf*), and Hadith, thereby playing a strategic role in shaping religious character. The integration of *Kitab Kuning* studies as local content at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati does not merely add religious subjects but serves as a foundational framework for cultivating students' Islamic values. Through structured and continuous learning, students are habituated to values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, patience, and respect for teachers and knowledge, which are reinforced through daily practices (Ach. Syaiful et al., 2025).

The contribution of *Kitab Kuning* studies is further strengthened through pesantren-based instructional methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and discussion. These methods foster intensive interaction between teachers and students, encouraging discipline, perseverance, learning responsibility, and facilitating the contextualization of textual material within real-life situations. This approach is effective in transforming moral values from the cognitive domain into students' attitudes and behaviors. The implementation of *Kitab Kuning* studies also strengthens students' disciplinary character (Nurhaswinda et al., 2025). Regular participation in learning activities, adherence to rules, and consistency in study habits gradually develop into internalized discipline. This discipline extends beyond *Kitab Kuning* learning and is reflected in other school activities.

In addition to fostering religious character, *Kitab Kuning* studies also contribute to strengthening national and civic values. The teachings of *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) promote moderate, tolerant, and responsible attitudes as citizens. Teachers contextualize the content of the texts within social and national life, enabling students to understand that Islamic moral values are aligned with national values. The reinforcement of Islamic character is further enhanced through teachers' exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) (Wahyu Hidayat, 2025). Teachers not only convey textual content but also demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that reflect Islamic moral values (Denmas Amirul Haq et al., 2025). Such role modeling deepens students' spiritual internalization and makes *Kitab Kuning* learning more applicable in daily life.

Inhibiting and Supporting Factors in the Implementation of *Kitab Kuning* Studies as Local Content

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of *Kitab Kuning* studies as local content at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati is influenced by various internal and external factors identified through interviews, observations,

and document analysis. The thematic analysis revealed two major categories, namely inhibiting factors and supporting factors.

Table 1. Inhibiting and Supporting Factors

Theme	Main Findings
Inhibiting Factors	Differences in educational backgrounds and reading abilities
	Low motivation, limited time, inadequate facilities
Supporting Factors	Teacher competence
	Institutional support and religious environment
	Parental involvement and religious habituation

One of the primary inhibiting factors identified by participants was the variation in students’ educational backgrounds. According to the teachers interviewed, students who had previously studied in madrasah diniyah or Islamic boarding schools demonstrated stronger Arabic reading skills and greater familiarity with classical Islamic texts than students from general elementary schools. As one teacher explained: “Students who come from pesantren backgrounds usually adapt more quickly because they already understand the basics of Arabic reading and religious terminology. Meanwhile, students from general schools require additional guidance and practice.” (Teacher Interview, 2026).

This disparity often results in differences in learning achievement and requires teachers to allocate additional time to improve students’ basic reading competencies before deeper discussions of moral values can be conducted. Observational data also showed that some students experienced difficulties in reading unvowelled Arabic texts (*kitab gundul*), which occasionally reduced their participation during classroom activities. Another inhibiting factor concerns students’ learning motivation. Several participants reported that some students perceived *Kitab Kuning* as a difficult subject because of its linguistic complexity and unfamiliar terminology. Limited instructional time and inadequate learning facilities were also identified as challenges affecting the effectiveness of the program.

Conversely, the study identified several supporting factors that contribute to the successful implementation of *Kitab Kuning* studies. Interviews with school leaders and teachers revealed that teacher competence plays a crucial role in facilitating students’ understanding of classical texts and moral values. Teachers were able to contextualize the content of the texts and connect religious teachings with students’ daily experiences, thereby making learning more meaningful (Dahmayanti & Nurmila, 2024). Institutional support was another significant factor. The principal and vice principal for curriculum affairs consistently provided policy support through curriculum integration, scheduling arrangements, and academic supervision. In addition, the religious atmosphere

of the madrasah and collaboration with nearby pesantren strengthened character development by providing continuous moral guidance beyond formal classroom hours (Chadijah et al., 2026).

Parental involvement also emerged as an important supporting factor. According to several participants, parents actively encouraged religious practices at home and monitored students' learning progress. Furthermore, religious habituation programs such as congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and short religious sermons (kultum) reinforced the values taught during *Kitab Kuning* lessons (Eva et al., 2026). These activities facilitated the internalization of moral values and contributed to the development of students' religious character in everyday life.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

The implementation of *Kitab Kuning* studies as local content at MTs Abadiyah Gabus Pati has been systematically integrated into the madrasah curriculum through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The findings indicate that *Kitab Kuning* learning contributes significantly to the formation of students' Islamic character through the internalization of religious values, discipline, responsibility, honesty, and respect, which are fostered through classroom learning activities, religious habituation programs, and teacher role modeling. Furthermore, the integration of pesantren educational traditions into formal madrasah education creates a holistic learning environment that supports both students' intellectual development and character formation. Although several challenges remain, including differences in students' educational backgrounds, limited instructional time, and inadequate learning resources, the effectiveness of the program is strengthened by teacher competence, institutional support, a religious school culture, and parental involvement.

Implication

Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on the integration of pesantren educational traditions within the formal education system and provides empirical evidence that *Kitab Kuning* studies can serve as an effective model for Islamic character education. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for madrasahs and curriculum developers in strengthening character education through the contextual integration of Islamic educational traditions into the formal curriculum.

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