

The Madrasah Principal's Strategies for Improving Student Discipline at Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton

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Abstract

The madrasah principal occupies a strategic position in the formation of pupil character, yet accounts of how a discipline strategy is actually enacted in an elementary madrasah remain scarce. This study examines the strategies the principal applies to improve pupil discipline at MI Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton, the way those strategies operate in the daily routine, and the obstacles they encounter. A qualitative descriptive case study was conducted through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, with the principal as primary informant supported by the vice principal, teachers, and pupils, and with source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking applied to the material. Five strategies were identified: personal example modelled on prophetic leadership principles, a personalised approach to individual pupils, dissemination of rules to pupils and families, recognition of disciplined conduct, and reporting of misconduct to parents. These are enacted through attendance taking before lessons, monitoring by a teacher team across the grounds and beyond school hours, and consistent application of reward and sanction, which together sustain a visible culture of discipline. Intervention by parents constitutes the main obstacle, addressed through open communication and discussion forums. The reported decline in misconduct rests on interviews and observation rather than on official records, so it is presented as an early indication and the madrasah is advised to institute a violation register.

Keywords: elementary madrasah, educational leadership, character education, madrasah principal, student discipline.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education delivered through Islamic religious instruction has become a central concern for Indonesian basic education, and discipline sits at the foundation of that work. A pupil who arrives on time, wears the uniform correctly, and keeps to the rules of communal worship is practising the self-regulation on which every other educational aim depends. Work on character education through Islamic religious education in the digital era argues that the transmission of values now competes with influences that reach children outside any institutional control, which raises rather than lowers the demand for consistent formation within the school (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022). Religious character in elementary settings is built through repeated daily practice rather than through instruction alone (Fauzieyah & Suyatno, 2024; Hardiansyah et al., 2021).

The madrasah principal occupies a central position in that process. Responsibility extends beyond administration and institutional governance to the supervision and continuous development of pupils' discipline, character, and academic performance. The principal functions as a role model whose punctuality, dress, and participation in communal worship are read by teachers and pupils as the operative definition of what the institution expects. Through consistent leadership, clear policy, effective supervision, and collaboration with teachers and parents, the principal shapes both moral character and academic achievement (Tamam & Muhid, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence gathered across cultures confirms that educational leadership carries a measurable association with pupil outcomes, and that the association is stronger in collectivist settings where authority relations are close (Karadag & Sertel, 2025; Hallinger et al., 2025).

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton prioritises character development among its pupils, which is visible in the guidance programmes the principal has established, ranging from the instilling of discipline and the strengthening of moral values to the cultivation of interests, talents, and a sense of responsibility in daily activity. This orientation matches the national educational aim of developing pupils into persons of faith, piety, and noble character (Rofiq, 2024). The madrasah operates under the auspices of the Arriyadlah Islamic Boarding School in Pandean Village, Paiton Subdistrict, and sustains itself without government financial assistance, so whatever discipline system it maintains rests on its own organisational effort.

The strategic role of the principal nevertheless meets several obstacles. Pupils arrive from differing family backgrounds, the surrounding social environment exerts its own influence, and technological change carries effects on character that run in both directions (Salisah et al., 2024). A focused, innovative, and sustainable strategy is required if character formation is to proceed reliably, and such a strategy has to be designed systematically, involve every stakeholder, and adapt to changing conditions and pupil needs (Yam, 2024). School culture operates as the medium through which such a strategy either takes hold or dissipates, since pupils comply with rules they see enacted consistently around them (Haq & Amin, 2023; Hayati et al., 2020).

The strategies examined in this study are organised around leadership principles drawn from the practice of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, which Indonesian madrasahs commonly summarise as exemplary conduct, a personalised approach, and equality of treatment (Susetiyo et al., 2022). Each principle carries a specific implication for discipline. Exemplary conduct places the burden of proof on the leader, since a rule that the principal does not observe loses its claim on pupils. A personalised approach requires that a violation be traced to its cause before a response is chosen, which distinguishes correction from mere punishment. Equality of treatment requires that the same rule apply irrespective of the standing of a pupil's family, which is

precisely the point at which discipline systems come under pressure in practice (Rofiq, 2024).

This framework converges with findings from the wider leadership literature rather than standing apart from it. Modelling by school leaders operates as one of the mechanisms through which leadership reaches pupil outcomes, and meta-analytic evidence indicates that leadership effects are transmitted largely through teachers and the climate they maintain rather than through direct contact with pupils (Hallinger et al., 2025). The association between educational leadership and pupil outcomes is also stronger in cultures marked by collectivism and by close authority relations (Karadag & Sertel, 2025), which describes the setting of an Indonesian madrasah attached to a boarding school. Reading prophetic leadership principles alongside this evidence allows the strategies reported below to be assessed on more than doctrinal grounds.

Existing Indonesian scholarship on religious character in elementary education concentrates on well-resourced institutions with established programmes, whether integrated Islamic schools or schools within large organisational networks (Fauzieyah & Suyatno, 2024; Nurani et al., 2024; Solekha & Suyatno, 2022), and a considerable share of that work is normative or based on literature review rather than on observation of a working discipline system. Studies of the principal's role frequently describe leadership functions in general terms without tracing how a particular strategy is enacted in the daily routine of a madrasah, how it meets resistance, and how the institution responds. The gap this study addresses is the absence of a close account of the strategies a madrasah principal actually deploys to raise pupil discipline in a self-financed elementary madrasah, together with the obstacles those strategies encounter.

Three questions guide the study. First, which strategies does the principal of MI Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton apply to improve pupil discipline. Second, how are those strategies enacted in the daily routine of the madrasah, and which actors carry them. Third, what obstacles arise in implementation and how does the principal respond to them. Answering these questions is expected to yield a contextual account of character formation that madrasahs and other Islamic educational institutions can examine against their own conditions, rather than a general prescription detached from any setting.

RESEARCH METHODS

Design and site

This study applied a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design (A'yun et al., 2025). The design follows from research questions that concern how a discipline strategy is enacted and experienced rather than how widely it is distributed, and a case study permits the strategy, its setting, and the reactions it provokes to be examined together. The site was Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton, selected purposively for three reasons: the madrasah maintains a visible discipline routine, it operates under a boarding school that extends supervision beyond school hours, and it sustains itself without government funding, so its organisational capacity rests on internal management (Asir et al., 2023).

Informants

Informants were selected purposively on the criterion of direct involvement in the discipline system of the madrasah. The principal served as the primary informant, since the research questions concern the strategies attributable to that office. Supporting informants comprised the vice principal, teachers assigned to the monitoring team and to duty rotations, and pupils subject to the routines described. Drawing on these four categories allowed the account given by the principal to be examined against the accounts

of those who implement the routine and of those who experience it. Interviews continued within each category until further conversations produced no new themes.

Table 1. Informant categories, their role in the discipline system, and the data supplied

Informant category	Role in the discipline system	Data supplied
Madrasah principal	Formulates disciplinary policy, forms and leads the monitoring team, handles objections from families	Interview on strategy, rationale, and obstacles
Vice principal	Supports policy implementation and coordinates staff assignments	Interview corroborating the account of policy and practice
Teachers on duty and on the monitoring team	Take attendance, conduct patrols, correct uniform violations, record incidents	Interview on daily enactment; observation of duty performance
Pupils	Subject to the morning routine, roll call, attendance checks, sanctions, and rewards	Interview on experience of the routine; observation of compliance

Drawing on these four categories allowed the account given by the principal to be examined against the accounts of those who implement the routine and of those who experience it, which is the arrangement on which source triangulation depends. Each category contributes a different vantage point on the same routine, so a divergence between what policy states and what practice delivers would surface in the comparison rather than remain hidden inside a single account.

Data collection

Three techniques generated the data. Observation covered the morning routine, the roll call on the field, duty patrols during lesson hours, and the attendance check conducted in front of the madrasah office outside school hours, and field notes recorded what was seen on the day of each visit (Agustini & Cahyan, 2024). Semi-structured interviews explored the reasoning behind each routine, the handling of violations, and the difficulties encountered, with prompts adjusted to each informant category. Documentation supplied supporting material in the form of madrasah regulations, attendance and violation records kept by the duty teacher, and photographs of activities. Combining the three techniques was intended to produce a systematic description of actual conditions in the field rather than a report of stated intentions alone.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Analysis proceeded through data reduction, data display, and the drawing and verification of conclusions, applied repeatedly rather than once (Rambe & Aslami, 2021). Interview material was transcribed and coded into categories corresponding to the research questions, after which the categories were grouped into the strategies reported below. Trustworthiness rested on source triangulation, comparing the accounts of principal, vice principal, teachers, and pupils on the same routine; on technique triangulation, comparing what informants described with what observation recorded and with what the madrasah's own records showed; and on member checking, in which interpretations were returned to informants for confirmation before they were fixed. Permission was obtained from the madrasah principal, participation was voluntary, and informants are identified by role rather than by name.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The daily discipline routine

Observation showed that pupils at MI Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton arrive punctually, which was evident from the morning routine of reciting short surahs and performing the ma'had prayer, followed by a roll call on the field ten minutes before lessons begin. A teacher on duty monitors the pupils and records attendance from the start of the morning routine until the pupils are directed to the field. Pupils who are not dressed appropriately, such as those without shoes or wearing the uniform incorrectly, are corrected by the duty teacher and are asked to put the uniform right, put on shoes, and clean part of the madrasah grounds. The whole process is supervised by the principal, who initiated the activity and holds responsibility for it (Hutasoit, 2025).

Attendance checking extends beyond the start of lessons. Acting on instructions from the principal, the duty teacher monitors the area behind the classrooms and other locations where pupils might absent themselves during lesson hours. Because the madrasah operates under the Arriyadlah Islamic Boarding School, the principal carries responsibility for pupil discipline around the clock rather than during school hours alone, so a further attendance check is conducted routinely in front of the madrasah office outside lesson times with the assistance of the duty teacher. The routine covers the full day of a resident pupil, which distinguishes this setting from a day school where supervision ends at dismissal.

Interview material indicates that the culture of discipline is treated as a foundation to be maintained and strengthened continuously rather than as a set of rules to be enforced when broken. Informants described discipline as a means of character formation through consistent habit and clear behavioural expectation, not merely as a mechanism for regulating conduct. The principal's leadership appears in the setting of clear standards, in ensuring their consistent application, and in requiring teachers to provide guidance and supervision. School culture research reports the same relationship, with pupil compliance rising where the rules are visibly and uniformly enacted (Haq & Amin, 2023; Hayati et al., 2020). To carry this work the principal formed and leads a monitoring team drawn from the teaching staff.

The team takes attendance before lessons, monitors the morning assembly in front of the madrasah office, and coordinates with senior teachers for regular patrols across the grounds. These activities are conducted systematically in order to observe punctuality, presence, and compliance with madrasah regulations. Continuous supervision and coordination among staff allow disciplinary problems to be identified early and addressed with guidance before they harden into a pattern. Distributing the work across a team rather than concentrating it in the principal is what makes the routine sustainable, and it matches evidence that leadership effects on pupils operate through the teaching staff rather than directly (Hallinger et al., 2025).

Five strategies applied by the principal

Analysis of the interview and observation material identified five strategies through which the principal pursues improved discipline. The first three concern the conduct of the institution itself, while the last two concern the relationship with pupils and families (Zulkifli, 2022).

1. Setting a personal example, in line with the leadership principles attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, whose practice is described in terms of exemplary conduct, a personalised approach, and equality (Rahayu et al., 2022). Exemplary conduct is treated as the most fundamental principle, and self-discipline accordingly takes priority through punctuality, neat attire, and active participation in congregational prayer at the mosque, so that the concept of discipline is illustrated concretely for pupils to follow.

2. Applying a personalised approach, which follows the second principle. Pupils arrive from differing backgrounds and meet differing difficulties, so the strategy involves close attention to individual conduct in order to identify behavioural patterns needing particular care, along with analysis of the causes behind a violation. Each problem can then be addressed appropriately rather than through a uniform response (Bellous, 2021).
3. Disseminating the rules and the sanctions attached to them. The dissemination is directed at parents and guardians as well as at pupils, so that both parties understand the consequences of a violation and share responsibility for maintaining a disciplined environment (Abubakar et al., 2023).
4. Recognising pupils who demonstrate discipline. Recognition takes the form of direct acknowledgement, formal awards such as certificates, or public recognition before the whole madrasah. Pupils who receive it feel their conduct valued, and the recognition operates as motivation for peers, which is consistent with evidence on the strength of peer influence at this age (Meilani & Tobing, 2023).
5. Reporting misconduct to parents or guardians as information about the pupil's progress. Involving the family is intended both to help the pupil understand the consequences of the conduct and to strengthen cooperation between madrasah and home in support of overall development (Salisah et al., 2024).

Table 2. The five strategies mapped to their guiding principle, observed form, and intended effect

Strategy	Guiding principle	Observed form in the madrasah	Intended effect
Personal example	Exemplary conduct	Principal punctual, neatly attired, present at congregational prayer	Discipline demonstrated rather than asserted
Personalised approach	Personalised treatment	Attention to individual conduct and analysis of the cause of a violation	Correction matched to the pupil
Dissemination of rules	Clarity and equality	Rules and sanctions communicated to pupils and to families	Shared understanding of consequences
Recognition of discipline	Positive reinforcement	Direct acknowledgement, certificates, public recognition	Motivation for the pupil and for peers
Reporting to families	Partnership with the home	Communication of misconduct as information on pupil progress	Cooperation between madrasah and family

Table 2 shows that only one of the five strategies operates through sanction, while the remaining four work through modelling, diagnosis, communication, and reinforcement. A repertoire weighted in this direction is consistent with the character education literature, which treats habituation and example as the primary instruments and reserves sanction for correction rather than for control (Hardiansyah et al., 2021; Solekha & Suyatno, 2022). The mapping also makes the dependencies visible. Recognition presupposes that the criteria are known, which presupposes dissemination, which in turn presupposes that the principal's own conduct matches the rule being disseminated.

Read together, the five strategies combine modelling, individual diagnosis, communication, positive reinforcement, and family involvement, which is a broader repertoire than sanction alone. The sequence matters as much as the content, since recognition and family communication both presuppose that the rules have already been disseminated and that the principal's own conduct matches them. Character education research in Indonesian elementary settings describes the same combination of example, habituation, and reinforcement as the mechanism through which values become dispositions (Fauzieyah & Suyatno, 2024; Solekha & Suyatno, 2022).

Obstacles arising from family intervention

Involving parents and guardians strengthens discipline in the ways described above, and it also generates the principal difficulty the madrasah encounters. Difficulty arises where perceptions and expectations diverge over the application of a sanction. Some parents disagree with the measure imposed on their child and regard it as inappropriate or excessive, and in certain cases they raise the objection directly with the principal and ask that the sanction be reconsidered. The situation becomes more complex where the parent concerned holds a position of standing within the madrasah environment, whether as a colleague, a senior staff member, or a supervisor, since consistency and fairness then come under additional pressure.

The principal responds with two proactive measures (Sunarto & Muhid, 2022). The first is open and transparent communication with parents and guardians, through which the reasoning behind disciplinary policy is explained rather than merely asserted. The second is a discussion forum bringing together senior or respected teachers, the parents or guardians concerned, and the pupil who committed the violation, in order to reach a joint resolution and to forestall direct intervention. Placing the conversation in a forum rather than in a private appeal changes the terms of the exchange, since the reasoning becomes visible to several parties at once and the outcome is harder to attribute to personal influence (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024).

The principal reports that the discipline strategy has succeeded, and bases the claim on interviews with several teachers and on observation indicating a reduction in pupil misconduct during the current year. No official quantitative record of violation rates was available to the researchers, so the reported reduction functions as an early indicator rather than as measured evidence. Stating the basis of the claim plainly matters more than asserting the outcome, and the absence of a violation register also identifies the most immediate improvement available to the madrasah, since a simple monthly tally kept by the duty teacher would convert an impression into evidence.

Discipline, school climate, and the conditions that sustain them

Improving pupil discipline supports academic, social, and personal development at the same time. Discipline helps pupils maintain a structured daily routine and contributes to character formation, self-control, responsibility, and respect for established rules. A consistent culture of discipline encourages positive habits, effective use of time, and appropriate conduct across different settings within the madrasah. Where disciplinary practice is applied consistently and fairly, pupils are more likely to understand accountability, and the institution becomes a safe and orderly environment conducive to meaningful learning (Aqfi & Yahfizham, 2024).

Four factors shape individual discipline in the accounts given by informants: self-awareness, adherence to rules, educational instruments, and sanction. Self-awareness is the foundation, since a pupil who grasps why discipline matters acquires an internal motive for complying with rules and norms, and self-control and independence grow from that understanding (Bellous, 2021). Adherence to rules is the practical step that

establishes consistency and order in daily life. Educational instruments supply the insight and skill needed for conduct that matches social norms and ethics. Sanction responds to inappropriate conduct by supplying motivation to avoid violation, guiding behaviour, and discouraging repetition, and it corrects conduct rather than merely punishing it.

Three further conditions enrich the four factors. The example set by supervisors, the principal, and teachers exerts a strong influence on pupil discipline and motivates the formation of focused conduct. A disciplined environment creates the atmosphere in which disciplinary values are internalised in daily life (Saptadi et al., 2023). Disciplined practice, meaning consistent repetition over time, converts compliance into habit, and it operates as a continuing effort rather than as a routine performed once (Hardiansyah et al., 2021). The principal also shapes discipline through the management of extracurricular activity, which supplies productive alternatives and a positive environment alongside the moral guidance offered directly (Handayani et al., 2025).

The strategies applied at MI Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton rest on these factors, combining consistent supervision, monitoring of attendance and conduct, and the application of reward and sanction in accordance with madrasah regulations. Continuous evaluation remains necessary in order to establish whether the strategies stay relevant as circumstances change, since evaluation identifies weaknesses, permits adjustment of the disciplinary approach, and supports the development of responses matched to pupil needs and institutional conditions. Sustained leadership, evaluation, and adaptive strategy together determine whether gains in character, responsibility, and discipline hold over time (Karadag & Sertel, 2025; Nurani et al., 2024).

Implications for practice

Three implications follow for madrasahs facing comparable conditions. The first concerns the distribution of responsibility. Discipline at MI Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton is sustained by a monitoring team rather than by the principal alone, which is what allows the routine to continue on days when the principal is occupied elsewhere. A madrasah that concentrates supervision in one office acquires a system that lapses whenever that office is absent, whereas a distributed arrangement survives ordinary interruption (Nurani et al., 2024).

The second concerns the handling of objections from families. Moving the conversation from a private appeal into a forum attended by senior teachers, the family, and the pupil changes what is at stake, because the reasoning becomes public and the outcome is harder to attribute to personal standing. Institutions that lack such a forum place the principal in a bilateral negotiation each time an objection arises, which is the condition under which consistency erodes (Abubakar et al., 2023). Communicating disciplinary policy to families before a violation occurs reduces the number of objections that reach that stage at all (Salisah et al., 2024).

The third concerns evidence. The madrasah maintains an active discipline routine yet keeps no systematic record of violations, so the effect of its own work remains invisible to it. A tally maintained by the duty teacher, recording date, category of violation, and response applied, would cost little and would convert institutional memory into data that the principal could use for evaluation and that external readers could assess. Character education programmes in Indonesian elementary schools frequently report the same absence, and it is the point at which a well-run programme most easily becomes a demonstrable one (Fauziyeh & Suyatno, 2024; Hayati et al., 2020).

Limitations of the study

Three limitations bound these conclusions. The study covers a single madrasah, so the configuration described here need not represent other elementary madrasahs,

particularly those without a boarding school attached or with government funding. The claim of improved discipline rests on the accounts of the principal and teachers together with researcher observation, and no violation register was available against which those accounts could be checked, so the improvement is reported as an indication rather than as a measured result. The design is cross-sectional, capturing the routine during one period, which leaves open whether the discipline formed under this system persists once pupils move to secondary education outside the institution.

CONCLUSION AND ADVICE

The principal of MI Raudlatul Munadhirin Paiton pursues improved pupil discipline through five strategies: personal example modelled on prophetic leadership principles, a personalised approach to individual pupils, dissemination of rules to pupils and families alike, recognition of disciplined conduct, and reporting of misconduct to parents. Concrete measures such as attendance taking before lessons, monitoring of conduct across the grounds and beyond school hours, and consistent application of sanction have produced a visible and sustained culture of discipline within the madrasah.

Intervention by parents and guardians constitutes the principal obstacle, and the principal addresses it through open communication and through discussion forums involving teachers, parents, and the pupils concerned. The reported decline in misconduct, which is not yet supported by official quantitative records, offers an early indication that the strategies are working rather than proof that they are. Sustaining the effort requires periodic evaluation and adaptation of the strategies to emerging needs, so that the madrasah remains disciplined, productive, and supportive of the holistic development of its pupils (Lestari et al., 2025).

Three recommendations follow. The madrasah is advised to institute a simple violation and attendance register maintained by the duty teacher, since a monthly tally would convert the present impression of improvement into evidence available to the principal and to external readers. Teachers on the monitoring team would benefit from a shared protocol governing how a violation is recorded and which response corresponds to which category, so that consistency does not depend on the individual on duty. Future researchers are encouraged to examine the same question with different methods or variables, including comparison across several madrasahs and the use of quantitative measures of disciplinary violation, in order to broaden understanding of the strategies through which pupil discipline is improved.

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